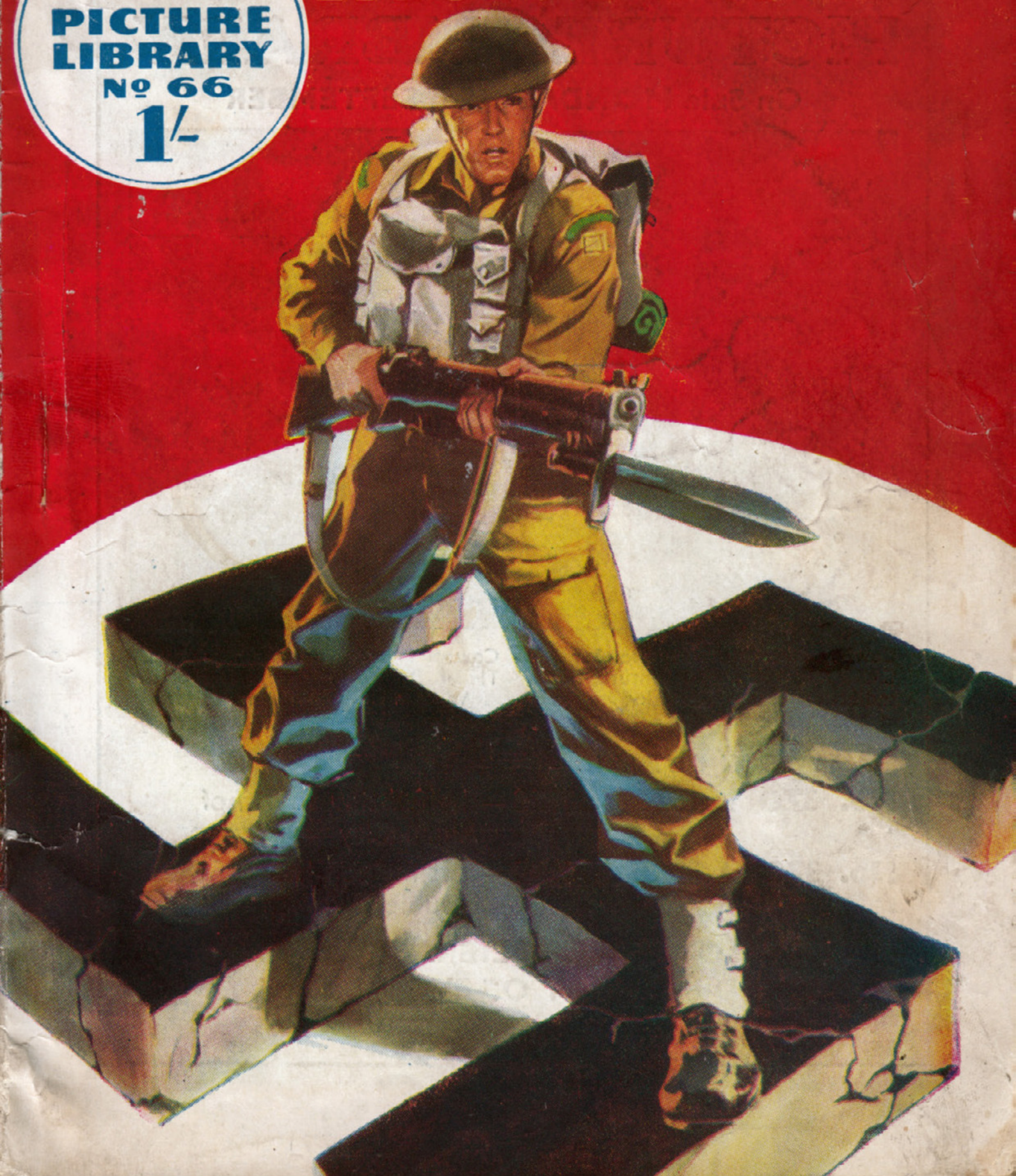


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# TASK FORCE



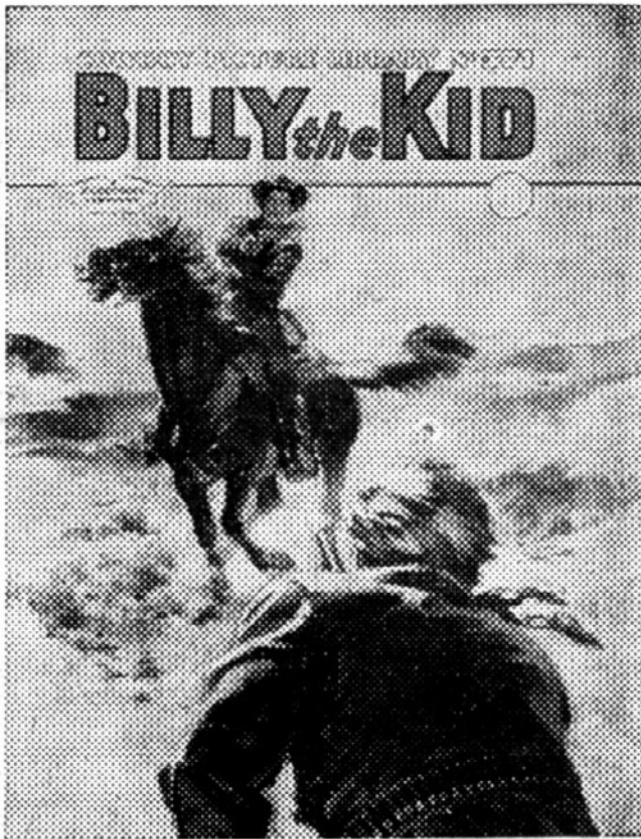


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# TASK FORCE

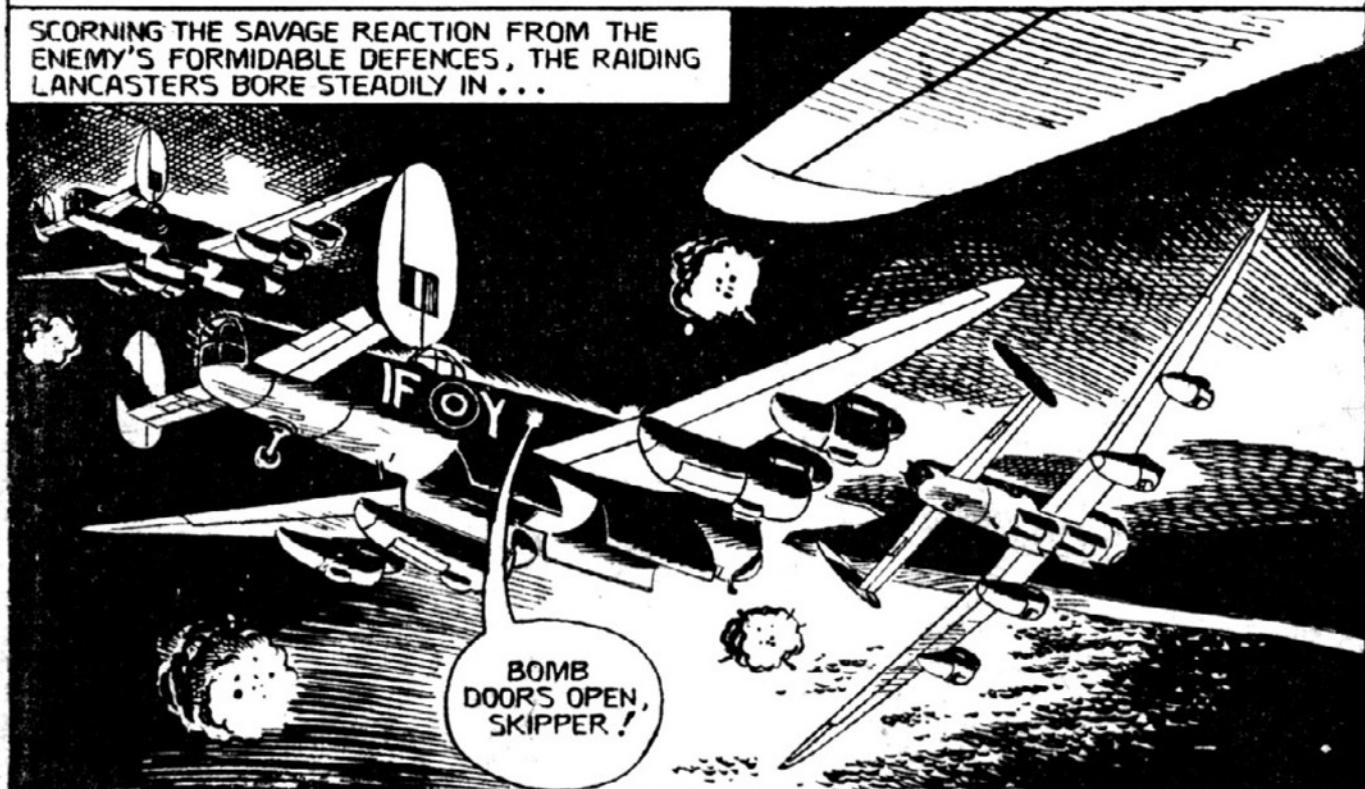
1944. BRITISH AND CANADIAN FORCES WERE HALTED ON THE THRESHOLD OF HOLLAND BY THAT GREAT WATER BARRIER, THE SCHELDT ESTUARY. ACROSS ITS SULLEN BREADTH LAY ENEMY-OCCUPIED WALCHEREN AND SOUTH BEVELAND, BLOCKING A SEAWAY TO COVETED ANTWERP.

TO R.A.F. BOMBER COMMAND FELL THE UNHAPPY TASK OF BREACHING THE DUTCH DYKES AND FLOODING THE FARMLANDS OF SOUTH BEVELAND... PRIOR TO THE ALLIED ASSAULT.



# Chapter 1 IN THE BREACH

SCORNING THE SAVAGE REACTION FROM THE ENEMY'S FORMIDABLE DEFENCES, THE RAIDING LANCASTERS BORE STEADILY IN ...



IN THE NOSE OF THE FOREMOST LANCASTER JN-Y, BOMB-AIMER SERGEANT CHRIS HARMER WAS GUIDING THE PLANE ON TO THE TARGET. HIMSELF A YOUNG FARMER IN PEACETIME, HE KNEW VERY WELL THE UTTER RUIN THAT THE INFLOODING SEA-WATER WOULD BRING TO THE FRIENDLY DUTCH.





CLOSE BESIDE CHRIS HARMER WAS MAJOR BILL MILNER, D.S.M., ROYAL MARINE COMMANDOS, VETERAN BEACH-HEAD FIGHTER FROM NORTH AFRICA TO NORMANDY. HE WAS THERE TO OBSERVE FOR HIMSELF THE EFFECT OF DYKE-BREACHING ON A FORCE OF MARINE COMMANDOS, AT THAT MOMENT WAITING OFF-SHORE TO STORM THE GAP.

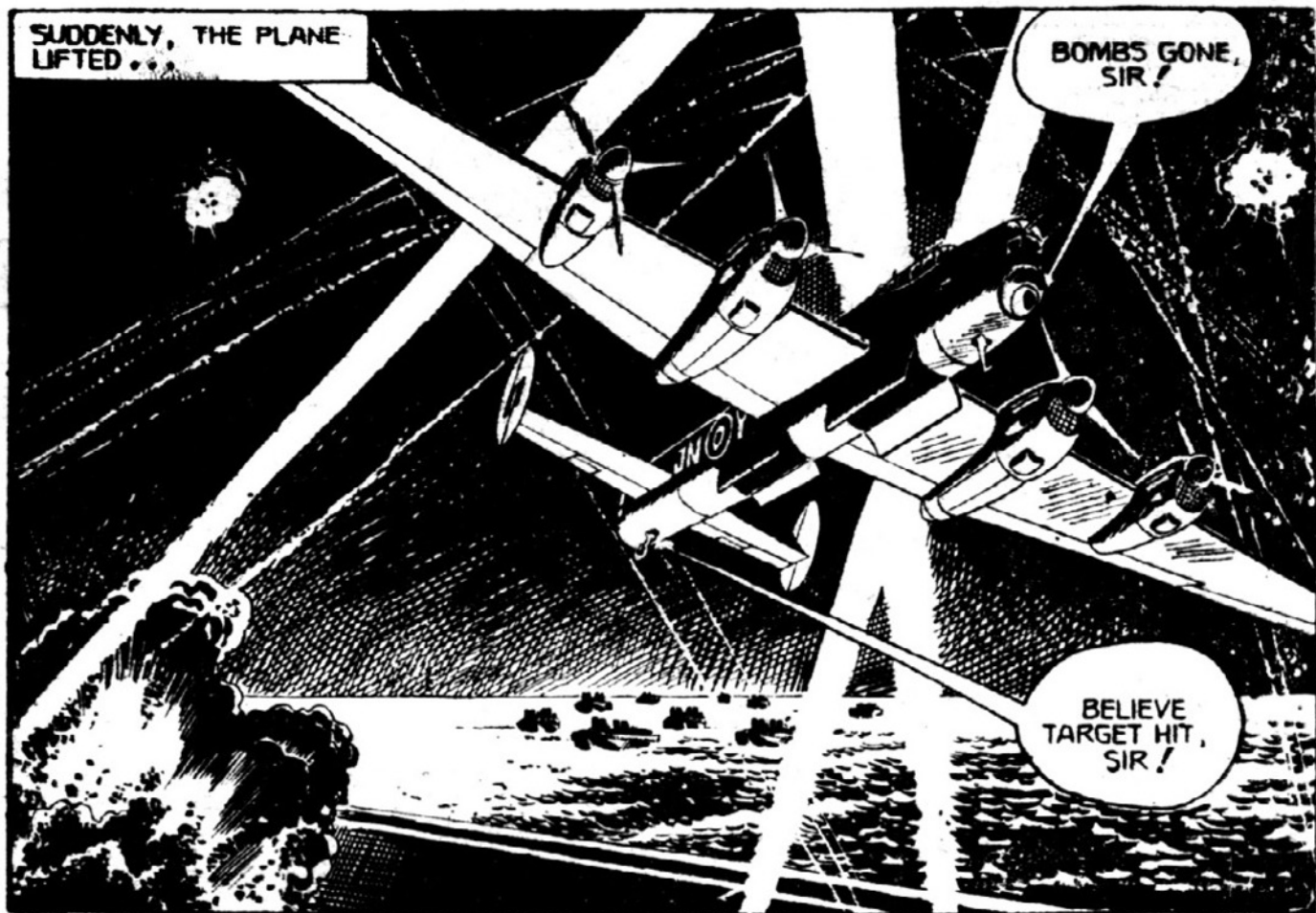
I WONDER IF THIS BREACHING WILL REALLY HELP JACK HALLAM'S LOT . . . PRETTY TRICKY WHICHEVER WAY YOU HIT THE SHORE.



SUDDENLY, THE PLANE LIFTED . . .

BOMBS GONE, SIR!

BELIEVE TARGET HIT, SIR!





## Task Force

THE GREAT AIRCRAFT CIRCLED THROUGH A MURDEROUS CURTAIN OF FIRE, ITS CREW COOLLY GAUGING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ATTACK.



WITH STUPENDOUS FORCE, THE SEA BROKE THROUGH TO ADD ITS TERRIFYING ROAR TO THE THUNDER OF THE LANCASTERS AS THEY SWEEP LOW OVERHEAD TO STRAFE THE GUN POSITIONS.



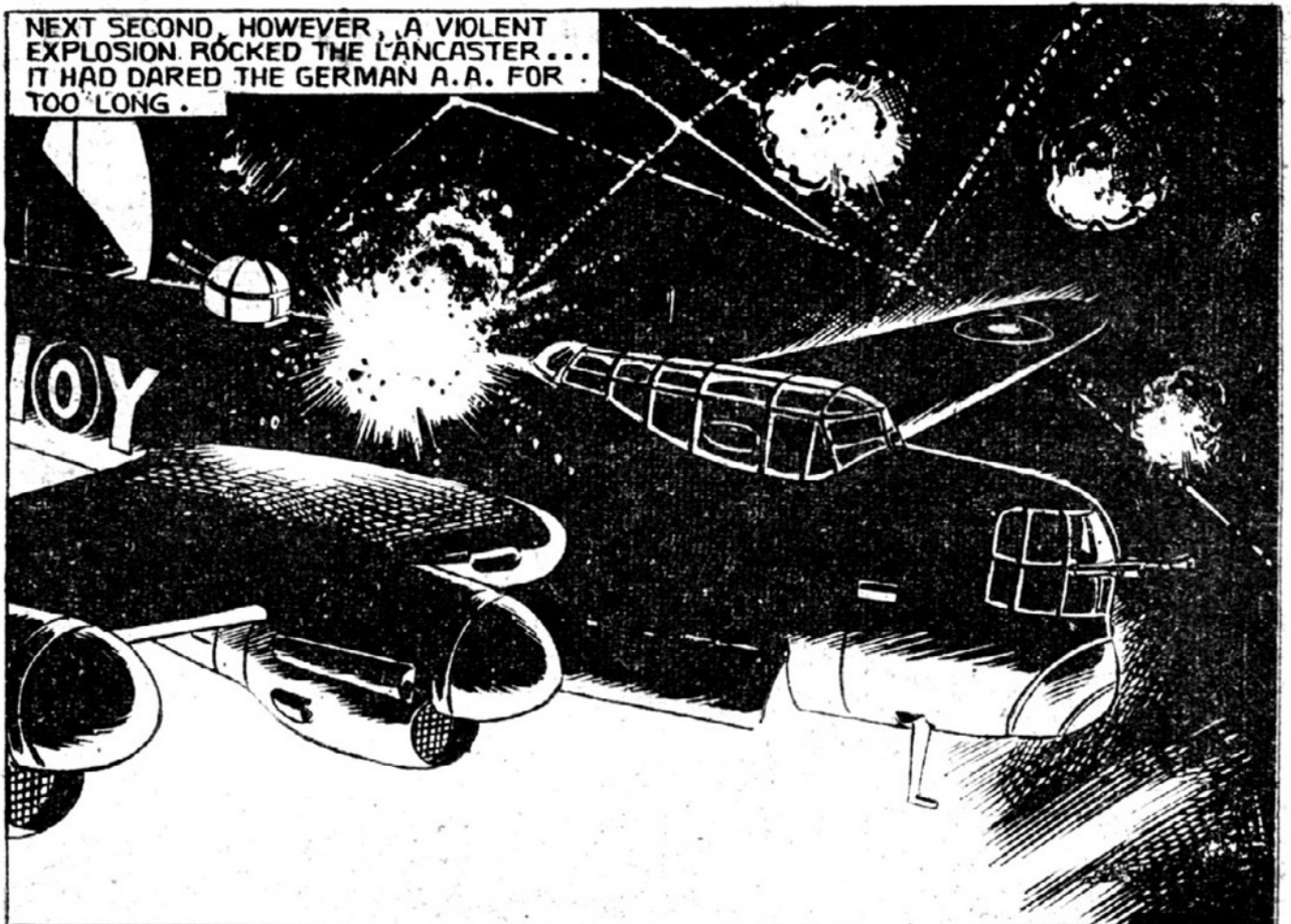


BILL MILNER SWITCHED HIS GAZE SWIFTLY SEAWARD TO WHERE THE ASSAULT BOATS WERE LINGERING SHOREWARD. SOON HE WAS TO LEAD A SIMILAR RAID ON NEIGHBOURING WALCHEREN ISLAND, AN EVEN TOUGHER PROPOSITION.



THERE ARE THE LANDING CRAFT! THEY'LL HIT THE GAPS IN A FEW MINUTES.

NEXT SECOND, HOWEVER, A VIOLENT EXPLOSION ROCKED THE LANCASTER... IT HAD DARED THE GERMAN A.A. FOR TOO LONG.



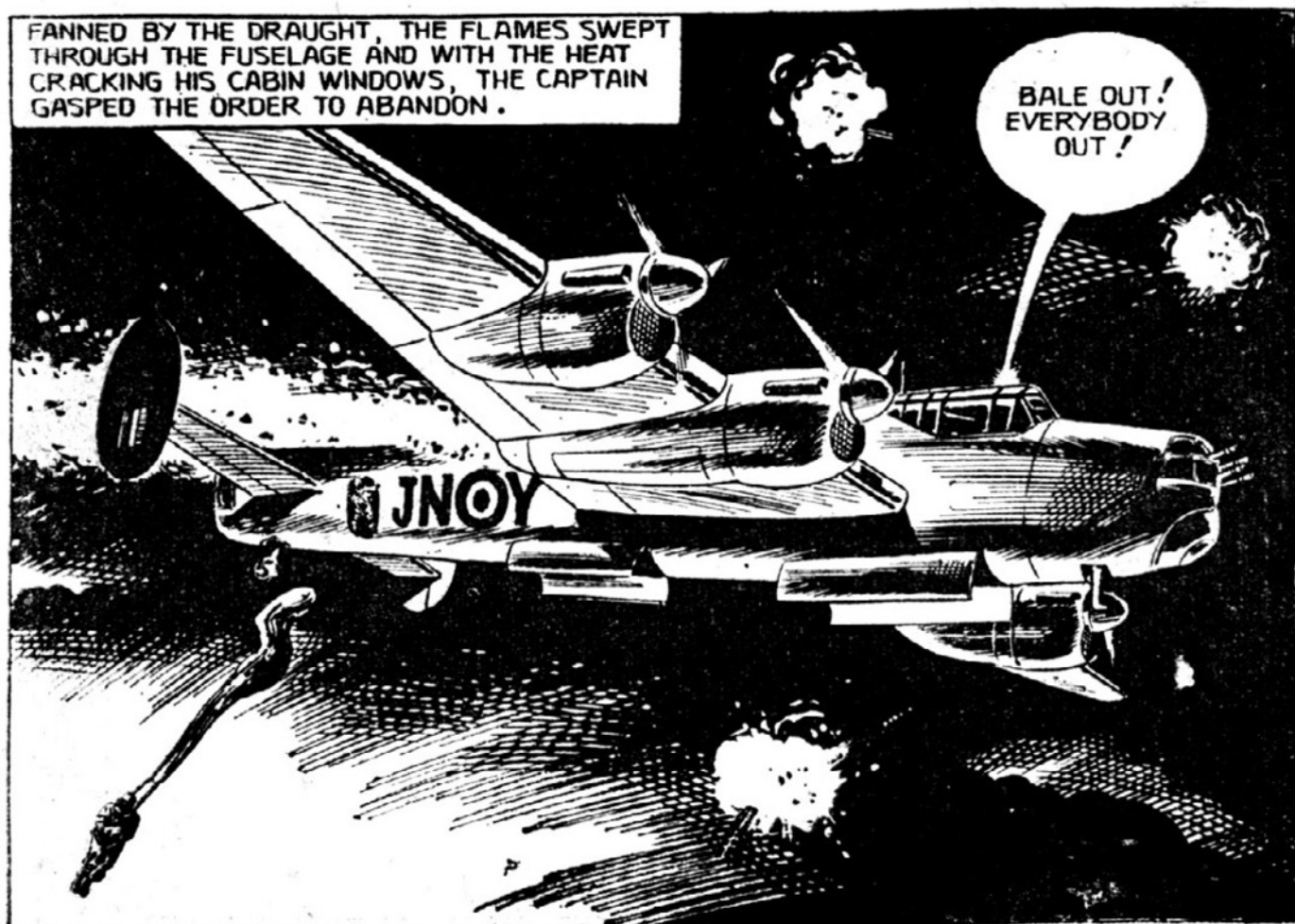


## Task Force

BY A FREAK OF BAD LUCK, THE ENEMY CANNON-SHELL HIT A RACK OF SIGNAL FLARES WHICH BURST INTO WHITE-HOT FLAME.



FANNED BY THE DRAUGHT, THE FLAMES SWEEPED THROUGH THE FUSELAGE AND WITH THE HEAT CRACKING HIS CABIN WINDOWS, THE CAPTAIN GASPED THE ORDER TO ABANDON.



ONE AFTER THE OTHER, BILL MILNER AND THE CREW LEAPED FROM THAT BLAZING INFERNO INTO THE COOL NIGHT AIR.



CHRIS HARMER HESITATED IN THE DOORWAY, NOT QUITE SURE WHETHER EVERYONE HAD JUMPED BUT THE PLANE LURCHED AND HE, TOO, WAS FLUNG OUT.



SOON, CHRIS SAW FLAT, FEATURELESS COUNTRY RUSHING UP TO MEET HIM AND AS HE NEARED THE GROUND, A SOLITARY FIGURE MOVED OUT FROM THE COVER OF SOME BUSHES.





## Task Force

THE AIRMAN'S HEART-SANK FOR CAPTURE SEEMED IMMINENT, BUT THE MAN WAS A YOUNG DUTCHMAN - EAGER TO HELP. HE QUICKLY BUNDLED CHRIS' TELL-TALE PARACHUTE OUT OF SIGHT AND INTRODUCED HIMSELF...

I AM BERNHARD GROOT. I LEAD YOU TO FRIENDS. COME 'SWIFTLY!'



GERMAN PATROLS HAD BEEN ALERTED BY THE COMMANDO ATTACK ON NEIGHBOURING BEVELAND AND THE YOUNG DUTCHMAN HAD TO USE EXTREME CAUTION AS HE LED CHRIS TO AN OLD SHED - THE MEETING PLACE OF THE LOCAL RESISTANCE GROUP. THERE, CHRIS TOLD HIS STORY...

A SAD THING, TO FLOOD OUR LAND - BUT IT IS WAR.

WE ARE SORRY TO HAVE TO DO IT BUT IT WAS NECESSARY FOR OUR ATTACK ON BEVELAND.



WE CAN HOPE THEN THAT SOON THEY WILL COME HERE TO WALCHEREN.

MEANWHILE, MAJOR BILL MILNER HAD PARACHUTED INTO THE COLD WATERS OF THE ESTUARY, BUT THANKS TO THE LITTLE RED LAMP AFFIXED TO HIS LIFE-JACKET, HE WAS EVENTUALLY FOUND, NUMBED BUT THANKFUL, BY A ROVING BRITISH M.T.B.



WARM CLOTHING AND A MUG OF STEAMING COCOA SOON REVIVED BILL - HIS FIRST QUESTIONS WERE OF THE OTHERS WHO HAD BALED OUT.



BILL ANSWERED EAGER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ATTACK ON BEVELAND AND THEN...





## Task Force

A FURTHER SEARCH PROVED FRUITLESS, AND THE M.T.B.'s SKIPPER RELUCTANTLY STEERED FOR FORT HAGEN, A PORT ON THE SOUTH SHORES OF THE ESTUARY. THERE, BILL WAS GREETED BY HIS COMMANDING OFFICER, BRIGADIER JACKSON.



BENEATH THE CHEERFUL GREETING, BILL SENSED THERE WAS SOMETHING WORRYING THE SENIOR MAN. IN THE OFFICE HE WAS SOON TOLD...

I HEAR OUR BOYS HAVE SECURED A BEACH-HEAD, SIR.

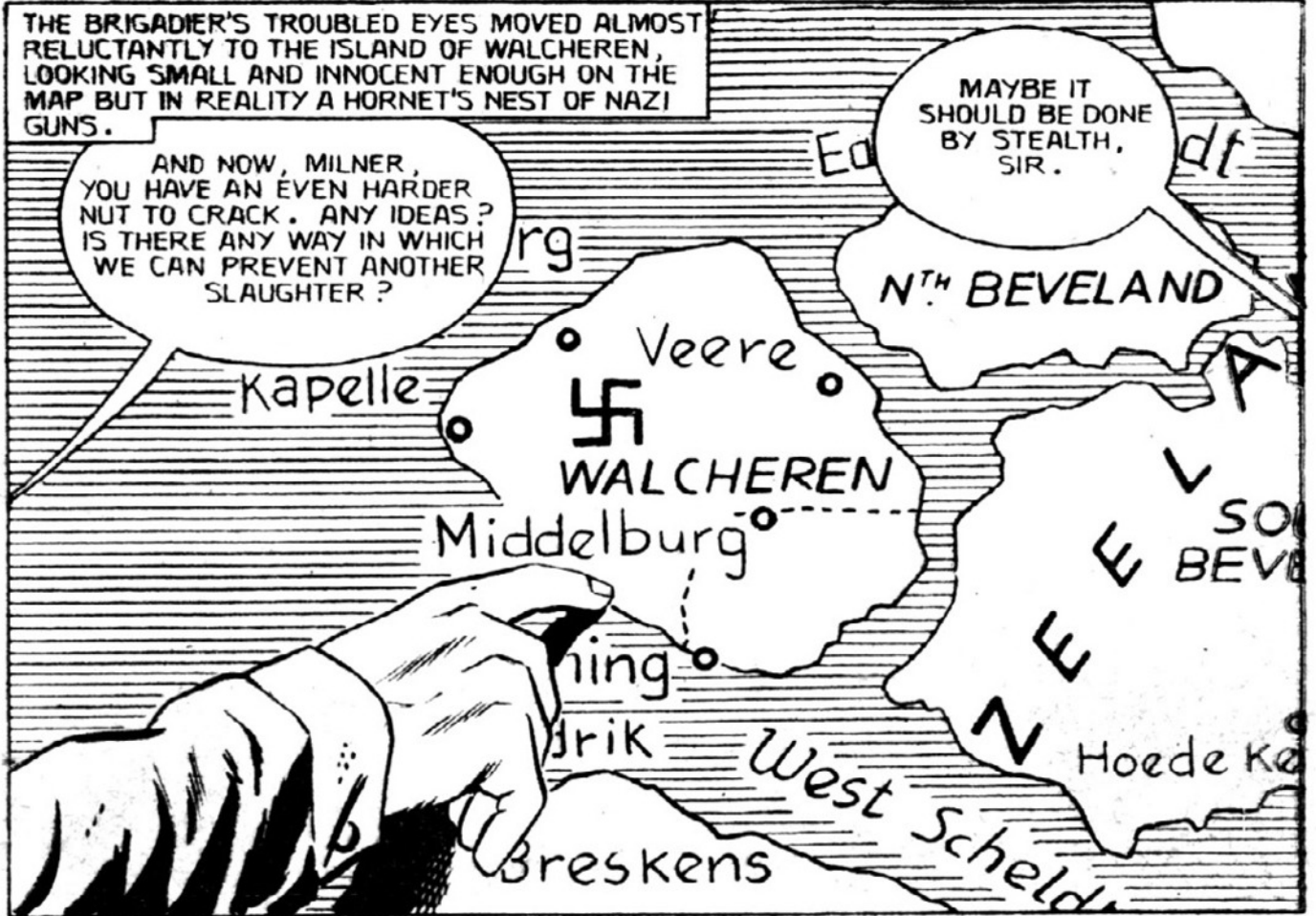
YES, WE HAVE A FIRM HOLD ON SOUTH BEVELAND - BUT AT A GRIEVOUS SACRIFICE OF LIVES - SOMETHING WHICH I EARNESTLY HOPE WILL NEVER BE REPEATED.



THE BRIGADIER'S TROUBLED EYES MOVED ALMOST RELUCTANTLY TO THE ISLAND OF WALCHEREN, LOOKING SMALL AND INNOCENT ENOUGH ON THE MAP BUT IN REALITY A HORNET'S NEST OF NAZI GUNS.

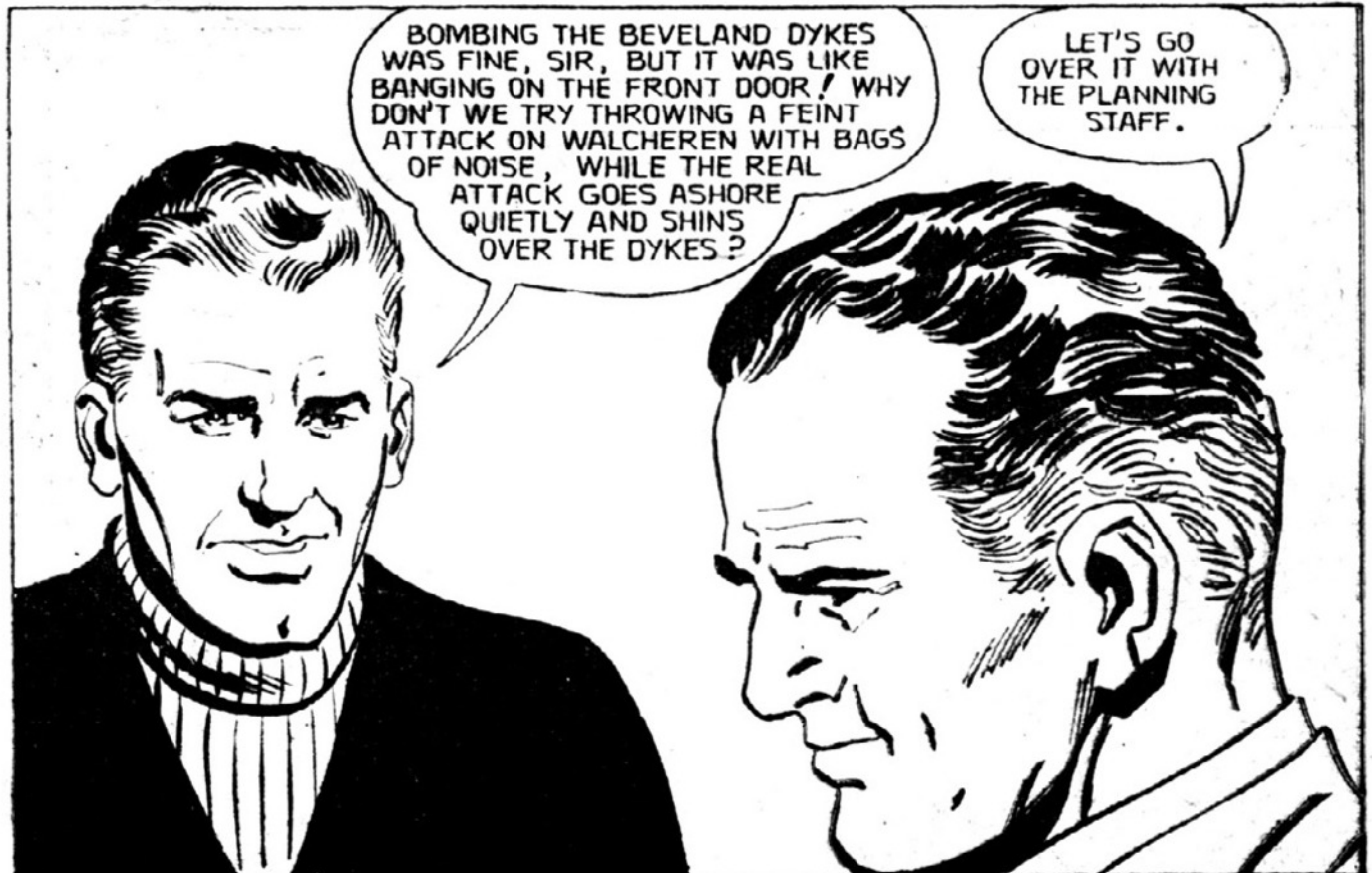
AND NOW, MILNER, YOU HAVE AN EVEN HARDER NUT TO CRACK. ANY IDEAS? IS THERE ANY WAY IN WHICH WE CAN PREVENT ANOTHER SLAUGHTER?

MAYBE IT SHOULD BE DONE BY STEALTH, SIR.



BOMBING THE BEVELAND DYKES WAS FINE, SIR, BUT IT WAS LIKE BANGING ON THE FRONT DOOR! WHY DON'T WE TRY THROWING A FEINT ATTACK ON WALCHEREN WITH BAGS OF NOISE, WHILE THE REAL ATTACK GOES ASHORE QUIETLY AND SHINS OVER THE DYKES?

LET'S GO OVER IT WITH THE PLANNING STAFF.





AFTER A GOOD DEAL OF CONTROVERSY AT STAFF LEVEL, BILL MILNER'S PLAN WAS SCEPTICALLY ACCEPTED. THEN, THINGS MOVED FAST - IN A FEW DAYS A BRIEFING OF MIXED NAVAL AND COMMANDO LEADERS WAS CALLED. IT WAS TO BE A DAWN ATTACK.

DUTCH BOATS, CALLED HOOGAARS, WILL TAKE US AS NEAR WALCHEREN AS CONDITIONS PERMIT. WE THEN TAKE TO DINGHIES. BY THAT TIME THE FEINT ATTACK WILL BE BANGING AWAY TO OUR LEFT, GIVING US A CHANCE TO SNEAK ASHORE.



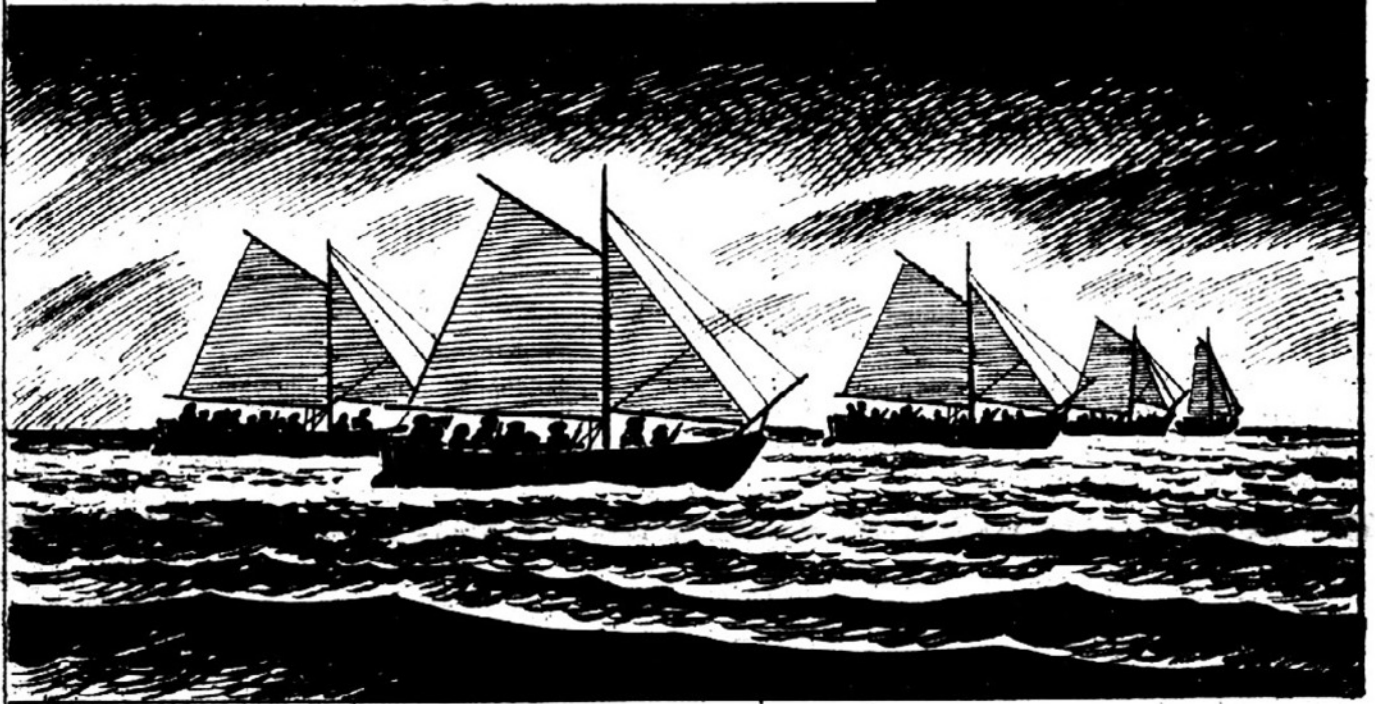
THERE WAS NO FEAR ON THE FACES BEFORE HIM - YET BILL MILNER KNEW HE WAS ASKING THESE MEN TO RISK THEIR LIVES ON A GAMBLE - HIS GAMBLE.

IT'S TRUE WE'RE A SMALL FORCE BUT IT'S NOT OUR JOB TO CAPTURE THE WHOLE DARN ISLAND. WE'VE GOT TO DESTROY THE COAST DEFENCES WHILE THE CANADIAN BOYS FOLLOW UP AND COME ASHORE IN FORCE.



## Chapter 2 **SILENT ASSAULT**

THE PEACEFUL LOOKING FLEET OF DUTCH MUSSEL-FISHING VESSELS PUT OUT FROM FORT HAGEN ONE DARK, MOONLESS NIGHT. ABOARD CROUCHED THE SET-FACED MEN OF THE RAIDING FORCE, PICKED FIGHTERS EVERY ONE.



THE FEINT ATTACK FORCE EMBARKED IN ITS ASSAULT BOATS LATER. IT WOULD APPROACH WALCHEREN A MILE TO THE LEFT OF THE REAL ATTACK, HOPING TO ATTRACT THE GERMAN DEFENCES TO THE WRONG SPOT.

THIRTY  
MINUTES TO  
ZERO...





MEANWHILE, ON WALCHEREN ITSELF, RESISTANCE MEN WERE ASSEMBLING AT THEIR LONELY RENDEZVOUS...



AND ON THEIR SECRET RADIO, THEY HEARD THE CODE WORD 'TULIP' — IT WAS THE SIGNAL WALCHEREN HAD LIVED AND PRAYED FOR. YOUNG BERNHARD GROOT COULD SCARCELY CONTROL THE QUIVER IN HIS VOICE AS HE BREATHED THE GOOD NEWS...



THEY COME!  
THE BRITISH  
COME!

WE  
KNOW OUR  
TASKS...

AT LAST —  
AT LAST!

ONE BY ONE THEY VANISHED INTO THE NIGHT UNTIL THE EXCITED CHRIS HARMER FOUND HIMSELF ALONE WITH BERNHARD AND JAN VEERT, A TOUGH YOUNG FARMER.

I'VE GOT TO HELP, BERNHARD. WHAT CAN I DO?

SURE YOU HELP. YOU COME WITH ME AND JAN. I SHOW YOU.



WITH QUICKENING PULSE, CHRIS FOLLOWED THE DUTCHMEN AS THEY MOVED CAUTIOUSLY TOWARDS THE DYKE WALL. SUDDENLY THEY HALTED AND BERNHARD POINTED...

SEE THOSE POLES AND NETS. THEY HIDE A VAN WHICH GIVES CURRENT TO THE SEARCHLIGHTS. WE MUST DESTROY IT!

BUT FIRST WE MUST WAIT FOR SOUND OF THE BATTLE.





STILL THE NIGHT WAS SILENT SAVE FOR THE SULLEN ROAR OF THE SEA AND THE LOW HUM OF THE POWER GENERATOR. THEY SHIVERED AND WAITED WHILE BERNHARD KEPT WATCH ON THE GERMAN AREA HEADQUARTERS.



A DESPATCH RIDER ! I SEE BRUCKNER AND HIS LITTLE PLAYMATES .

BERNHARD WAS RIGHT. IT WAS BRUCKNER HIMSELF - OBERSTLEUTNANT ERNST BRUCKNER, DEFENCE COMMANDER FOR SOUTH WALCHEREN. HE QUESTIONED THE DESPATCH RIDER SHARPLY...



TELEPHONE WIRES CUT, EH ? WHERE IS THIS ATTACK ?

THREE KILOMETERS WEST, MEIN KOMMANDER... MANY SHIPS !

BRUCKNER'S EYES NARROWED - HIS WAS A HARD, SHREWD BRAIN.



WE MUST RUSH EVERY SPARE SOLDIER THERE AT ONCE, JA !

FOOL ! NO MAN LEAVES HIS POST. FIRST WE INVESTIGATE. COME !

AS BERNHARD WATCHED THE GERMANS TURN AND MOVE AWAY, CHRIS HARMER TOUCHED HIM ON THE SHOULDER...

*LISTEN!*  
THERE'S FIRING!  
IT'S THE FEINT  
ATTACK!



CHRIS' EARS HAD NOT DECEIVED HIM. THE FEINT ATTACK FORCE SWEEPED IN TOWARDS THE BEACH WITH GUNS BLAZING.

*FIRE!*  
MAKE AS MUCH  
NOISE AS YOU  
CAN!





ARRIVING BY FAST CAR, ERNST BRUCKNER SOUGHT TO ASSESS THE WEIGHT OF THE ATTACK AND WHAT HE SAW MADE HIM PAUSE. THE FATE OF THE ATTACK HUNG IN THE BALANCE...

SHALL WE NOT OPEN FIRE, MEIN KOMMANDER?

WAIT! OUR VISITORS MAKE MUCH NOISE... TOO SOON... THAT IS NOT THE USUAL WAY OF THE BRITISH.



ALONG THE COAST, THE SOUND OF FIRING HAD GALVANISED THE THREE HIDDEN WATCHERS INTO VIOLENT ACTION...

AAAGH!

ACH...!



CHRIS WAS THE FIRST TO SPRING INTO THE VAN. A QUICK LOOK ROUND AND HE RIPPED OUT THE SEARCHLIGHT CABLE...



THE EFFECT WAS INSTANTANEOUS...



THE SILENT ATTACK WAS ALREADY ON ITS WAY IN - WITH MAJOR BILL MILNER IN THE LEADING RAFT...





ASHORE, THE FAILURE OF THE SEARCHLIGHTS WAS REPORTED TO BRUCKNER . . .



INSTANTLY, THE NAZI OFFICER KNEW WHAT HE MUST DO . . .



STEALTHILY, REINFORCEMENTS TOOK UP POSITIONS IN THE DARKENED SECTOR AND THEIR OMINOUS MOVEMENT WAS NOT LOST ON THE THREE DISMAYED WATCHERS. SOMETHING HAD GONE WRONG . . .



THE MARINE COMMANDOS WERE ALREADY LEAPING ASHORE — SCRAMBLING UP THE SLIPPERY STONEWORK OF THE DYKE WALL.



THE FIRST RANKS CRAWLED OVER THE PARAPET — AND A BLAZING INFERNO OF MACHINE-GUN FIRE RIPPED INTO THEM.





AGAIN AND AGAIN THEY STORMED THE PARAPET, NOT COUNTING THE COST, BUT SUDDEN DEATH MET THEM EVERY TIME. BRUCKNER'S EYES GLINTED IN EVIL SATISFACTION.

AHA...! YOU SEE, GENTLEMEN — THE STUPID ENGLANDERS COULD NOT HOODWINK ME!



THE RAIDING FORCE HAD BEEN DECIMATED BUT BILL MILNER HAD NOT YET ADMITTED DEFEAT...



TELL 'EM BEHIND THE WALL TO THROW EVERYTHING THEY'VE GOT. THE REST OF US WILL RUSH THE NEAREST JERRIES.

THE CHARGE WAS DESPERATE—SUICIDAL—AND FOR A WHILE IT LOOKED AS IF IT MIGHT SUCCEED.



A SECOND WAVE FROM THE DYKE WALL SWEEPED IN TO REINFORCE THE OTHERS—IT WAS HAND TO HAND, STEEL TO STEEL...

UP THE  
MARINES!





AGAINST THE NORMAL DEFENCES THEY MIGHT HAVE WON THE DAY — BUT THE DEFENCES HAD BEEN DOUBLED.



FROM A SAFE DISTANCE, BRUCKNER'S SELF-SATISFACTION TURNED TO CONTEMPT.

THE STUPID BRITISH! WILL THEY NEVER LEARN THAT THE GERMAN SOLDIER HAS NO EQUAL! DO THEY THINK THEY CAN STOP THE BULLETS WITH THEIR BARE HANDS?



AT LAST BILL MILNER WAS FORCED TO A BITTER DECISION...

ALL RIGHT! BACK, EVERYBODY! BACK TO THE BOATS!



RELUCTANTLY THE MARINES  
OBEYED...

AAAGH!



BILL AND A FEW PICKED MEN  
KEPT THE ENEMY AT BAY WHILE  
THEIR COMRADES LAUNCHED THE  
DINGHIES.





THEN IT WAS EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF WITH GERMAN BULLETS PICKING OFF THE EXHAUSTED SWIMMERS IN THE ICY WATER.



A MOTOR GUN BOAT OFF SHORE PICKED UP THE SURVIVORS — THEY WERE PITIFULLY FEW.

HOW'S THE TALLY, SIR?

BAD. WE'VE LEFT A LOT OF GOOD MEN BEHIND, I'M AFRAID.



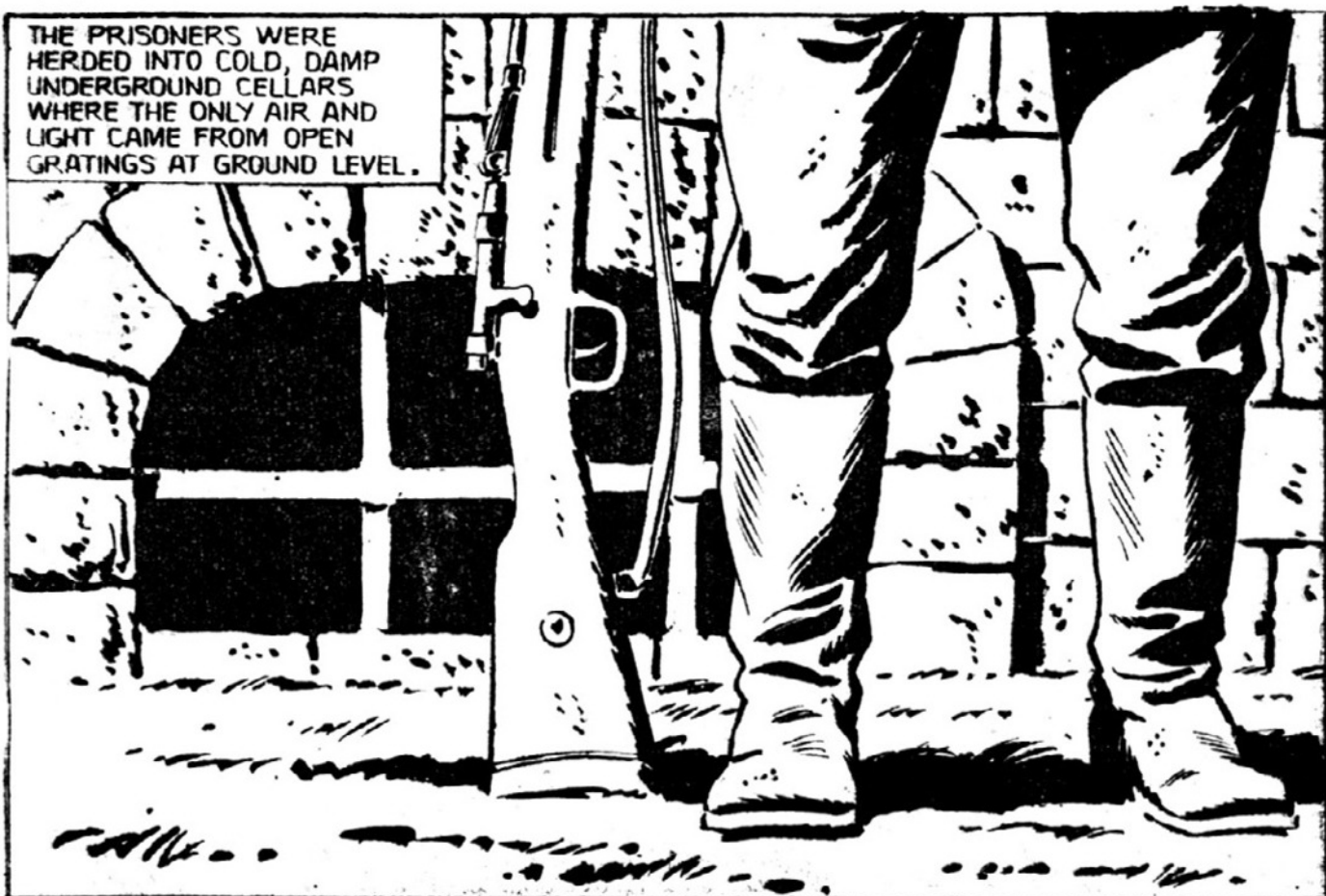
HAD BILL MILNER'S BITTER THOUGHTS BEEN ABLE TO CARRY HIM BACK TO WALCHEREN HE WOULD HAVE SEEN THE HUMILIATION HEAPED UPON THE GALLANT MEN WHO HAD BEEN LEFT ASHORE.

A SPELL IN THE CELLAR PRISONS WILL COOL THEIR SPIRIT!

KEEP MOVING!

LAY OFF, YOU SWAB — HE'S WOUNDED!

THE PRISONERS WERE HERDED INTO COLD, DAMP UNDERGROUND CELLARS WHERE THE ONLY AIR AND LIGHT CAME FROM OPEN GRATINGS AT GROUND LEVEL.





THE FAILURE OF THE RAID HAD FLUNG THE DUTCH RESISTANCE INTO A SORRY FLIGHT. THEY HAD BOLDLY SHOWN THEIR HAND AND MANY WERE CORNERED AND DIED FIGHTING.



OTHERS, INCLUDING THE BRITISH AIRMAN, CHRIS HARMER, SLIPPED AWAY INTO HIDING, BUT THE ENEMY WERE HUNTING THEM VENGEFULLY.

WILL THE  
BRITISH TRY  
AGAIN?

OF COURSE.  
SOMEHOW WE  
MUST GET TO THE  
RADIO SET AND  
FIND OUT.

YES,  
MAYBE WE HEAR  
A MESSAGE.



CHRIS HARMER'S FAITH IN THE MARINE COMMANDOS WAS TO BE AMPLY ANSWERED. DEFEAT HAD NO PLACE IN THEIR TRADITIONS. MAJOR BILL MILNER KNEW BUT ONE ALL-CONSUMING PURPOSE - TO WHIP THE ENEMY ON WALCHEREN ISLAND.





## Chapter 3

## ROCKET SHIPS

SENIOR OFFICERS, RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CLEARANCE OF THE NETHERLANDS, GATHERED IN CRITICAL CONFERENCE. THEY AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO A FULL-SCALE FRONTAL ATTACK, BUT...



THE OPERATION WAS APPROVED AND BILL LOST NO TIME IN GETTING THE NAVY TO GIVE HIM ANOTHER LOOK AT A SPECIALLY EQUIPPED TANK LANDING CRAFT.

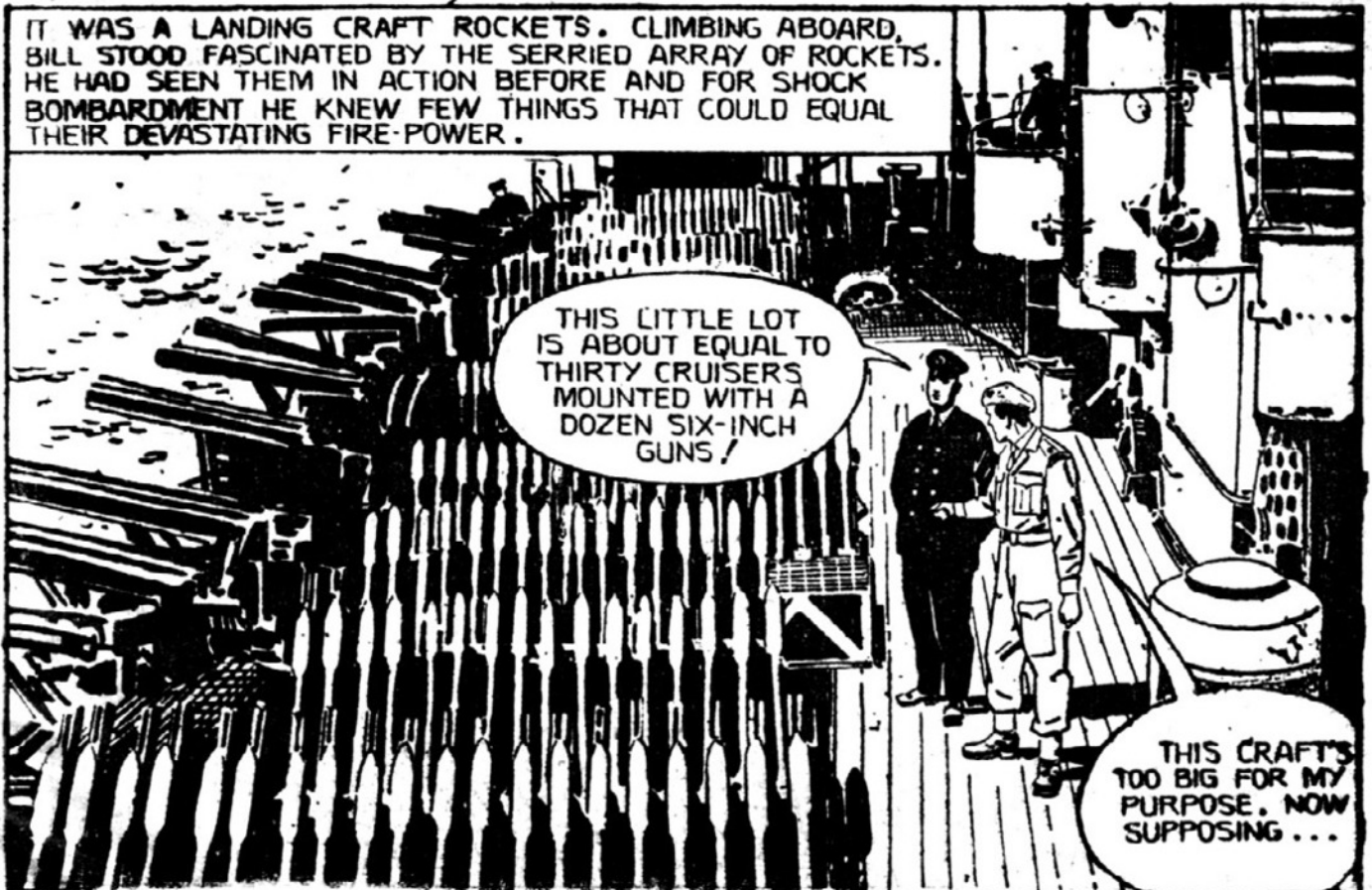
HERE SHE IS, MAJOR. A FLOATING GUY FAWKES NIGHT.



IT WAS A LANDING CRAFT ROCKETS. CLIMBING ABOARD, BILL STOOD FASCINATED BY THE SERRIED ARRAY OF ROCKETS. HE HAD SEEN THEM IN ACTION BEFORE AND FOR SHOCK BOMBARDMENT HE KNEW FEW THINGS THAT COULD EQUAL THEIR DEVASTATING FIRE-POWER.

THIS LITTLE LOT IS ABOUT EQUAL TO THIRTY CRUISERS MOUNTED WITH A DOZEN SIX-INCH GUNS!

THIS CRAFT'S TOO BIG FOR MY PURPOSE. NOW SUPPOSING...





## Task Force



BUT AN IDEA WAS ONE THING AND ITS REALISATION ANOTHER—AS BILL FOUND OUT WHEN HE WENT TO SEE THE RESULTS A FEW DAYS LATER.



THE BULK OF BUFFALOES ARE WANTED FOR THE JOB AT WESTKAPELLE. ONE THING, YOURS WILL BE A BIT MORE LETHAL THAN THEIRS — EVEN THIS SMALL BATTERY PACKS A HECK OF A PUNCH.



THE TOWN OF WESTKAPELLE, ON THE SOUTH WEST CORNER OF WALCHEREN, WAS TO BE THE TARGET FOR THE MAIN ATTACK BY ANOTHER FORCE OF MARINE COMMANDOS. BILL SIGHED RESIGNEDLY.

ON THE WAY OUT FOR A TRIAL WITH THE ROCKETS, THE BUFFALO PASSED A SHERMAN "SWIMMING TANK."

BY THE WAY, I HEAR YOU'RE GETTING SOME OF THESE CRAZY SHERMANS, TOO.

IS THAT SO? NOW I FEEL I'M GETTING SOMEWHERE!



THE RESULT OF THE ROCKET TEST PLEASED BILL EVEN MORE. THIS WAS THE FIERY SPEARHEAD WHICH MIGHT BLAST A GAP IN THE WALCHEREN DEFENCES.



MEANWHILE, PREPARATIONS WERE MOUNTING TO A FEVERISH CLIMAX. BILL MILNER FELT UNUSUALLY STRAINED AS TIME BEGAN RUNNING OUT. YET HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT ALL WAS WELL ...

EVERYTHING CLEAR IN YOUR MIND NOW, BILL?

QUITE, SIR. THE LANCASTERS BREACH THE DYKE JUST BEFORE DAWN ... MY ROCKET BUFFALOES GO IN WITH THE FLOOD AND SMASH A WAY THROUGH THE FIRST DEFENCES ...



... NEXT FOLLOW THE SWIMMING TANKS, AND FINALLY THE ASSAULT BARGES. WE ESTABLISH A BRIDGEHEAD AND HOLD IT UNTIL RELIEVED BY THE MAIN WAVE OF CANADIANS.





ON THE NIGHT BEFORE THE ATTACK, BILL MILNER WAS PRESENT AT THE BRIEFING OF THE LANCASTER CREWS ON DYKE CONSTRUCTION.

THE OUTSIDE SLOPE OF THE DYKE IS MADE IMMENSELY STRONG BY HONEYCOMBED CONCRETE BLOCKS. YOU'LL MOVE NOTHING UNTIL YOU'VE MOVED THEM. IT'S A WASTE OF EFFORT TO JUST BOMB ALONG THE TOP.



THE WING COMMANDER PUT IN A WORD...

WE AIM TO DROP OUR BOMBS IN THE SEA CLOSE BESIDE THE DYKE - THAT'LL SET UP A TERRIFIC WATER PRESSURE.

YES, IT'S YOUR ONLY CHANCE. IT'LL BE HIGH-TIDE, SO YOU'LL HAVE THE DEPTH OF WATER, ALL RIGHT.



THAT SAME NIGHT, A GENERAL WARNING OF POSSIBLE FLOODING WAS BROADCAST TO THE DUTCH ON WALCHEREN.

WE SAY TO YOU BRAVE PEOPLE - MOVE AWAY FROM COASTAL AREAS. REMEMBER YOUR ANIMALS... YOUR PETS. HAVE GOOD CHEER. V FOR VICTORY... V FOR VICTORY.



THEN FOLLOWED THE CODE WORD "TULIP" TO ALERT THE DUTCH RESISTANCE, AND A MORE DETAILED WARNING. RISKING THEIR NECKS, CHRIS HARMER AND BERNHARD HAD REACHED THEIR HIDDEN SET JUST IN TIME, FEELING THAT SOMEONE HAD TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THE ALLIES.

AT DAWN, THEY BOMB THE DYKES!

WHERE?



CHRIS COULD UNDERSTAND HIS FRIEND'S TWISTED FEELINGS. HIS LAND MIGHT BE FREED BUT IT WOULD BE RUINED, LOST TO THEIR EVER HUNGRY ENEMY - THE SEA!

THEN CHRIS HARMER SUDDENLY FROZE WITH A NEW APPALLING THOUGHT. HIS MIND LEAPT TO THE GERMAN HEADQUARTERS. HE SAW THE SMASHED DYKE - THE INRUSHING SEA...

GREAT HEAVENS! THE PRISONERS... DOWN IN THOSE CELLARS... THEY'LL DROWN!



THERE WAS NO TIME TO LOSE FOR AT DAWN THE ATTACK WOULD COME. A MESSAGE WAS SMUGGLED TO THE BURGOMASTER WHO AT ONCE WENT TO SEE OBERSTLEUTNANT BRUCKNER. SURELY HE WOULD MOVE THE PRISONERS; BUT ONE LOOK AT THAT CYNICALLY SMILING GERMAN WAS ANSWER ENOUGH...

MY DEAR BURGOMASTER - IF THE STUPID BRITISH, BY THEIR WANTON DESTRUCTION OF YOUR DYKES AND LAND, DESTROY THEIR OWN COMRADES, THAT IS NO CONCERN OF MINE.



I WILL NOT PRESS HOW YOU CAME BY THIS DETAILED INTELLIGENCE. I AM GRATEFUL TO LEARN JUST WHERE THE BRITISH WILL STRIKE! GOOT NIGHT, MEIN BURGOMASTER!





NEWS OF THE BURGOMASTER'S FAILURE REACHED THE ANXIOUSLY-WAITING BRITISH R.A.F. SERGEANT. DESPERATELY, HE CAST ABOUT IN HIS MIND...

...WE MIGHT'VE RUSHED THE PLACE BY FORCE BUT WE'RE ALL SCATTERED NOW. WE MUST WARN THEM OVER THE OTHER SIDE! THEY MUSTN'T BOMB THE DYKES!

BUT HOW, MY FRIEND? OUR RADIO TRANSMITTER HAS BEEN DISCOVERED BY THE GERMANS.

NO MORE SIGNALS CAME THROUGH ON THE LITTLE RECEIVER AND AS CHRIS REPLACED THE EARPHONES, HE CAME TO A SUDDEN DECISION. IT WAS CRAZY BUT IT WAS BETTER THAN SITTING... WAITING...

I'VE GOT TO GET BACK... BACK ACROSS THE WATER... MAYBE THERE'S STILL TIME...

I HAVE A BOAT HIDDEN. I COME WITH YOU.

SUDDENLY, THE DOOR OF THE SHED CRASHED OPEN. BROAD, STEEL-HELMETED FIGURES BLOCKED THE WAY AND A HARSH VOICE RANG OUT.

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

INSTANTLY, CHRIS LAUNCHED HIMSELF FORWARD...

UUUGH!



NEXT MOMENT, HE AND BERNHARD WERE RACING THROUGH THE NIGHT, WHIPPED ON BY SHOUTS AND BULLETS THAT RIPPED ABOUT THEM.



IT WAS AN HOUR BEFORE BERNHARD COULD LEAD CHRIS SAFELY TO THE LITTLE BOAT ON A REMOTE SECTION OF THE COAST.



THEY STRAINED AT THE OARS UNTIL THEY WERE CLEAR OF LAND AND THEN BERNHARD STEPPED THE LITTLE MAST AND SET THE SAIL. BUT THE ELEMENTS WERE AGAINST THEM...

SLOW HEADWAY,  
MY FRIEND... AGAINST  
THE WIND.

WE MIGHT DO BETTER  
ON THE OTHER TACK. DO  
YOUR BEST, BERNHARD, FOR  
HEAVENS' SAKE!



AFTER SEEMING HOURS OF TEDIOUS TACKING, IT LOOKED TO THE SPRAY-DRENCHED PAIR THAT THEIR OBJECTIVE WAS AS FAR AWAY AS EVER. THEN THE WIND SUDDENLY DIED, LEAVING THEM MOTIONLESS IN A CHILL EARLY MIST.

THERE'S  
NOTHING FOR  
IT NOW BUT  
TO ROW.



BEATING DOWN A MOUNTING DESPAIR CHRIS SEIZED THE OARS. HE DARE NOT LOOK FOR THE FIRST GLIMMER THAT WOULD HERALD THE DAWN.



## Chapter 4 STORMING THE DYKES

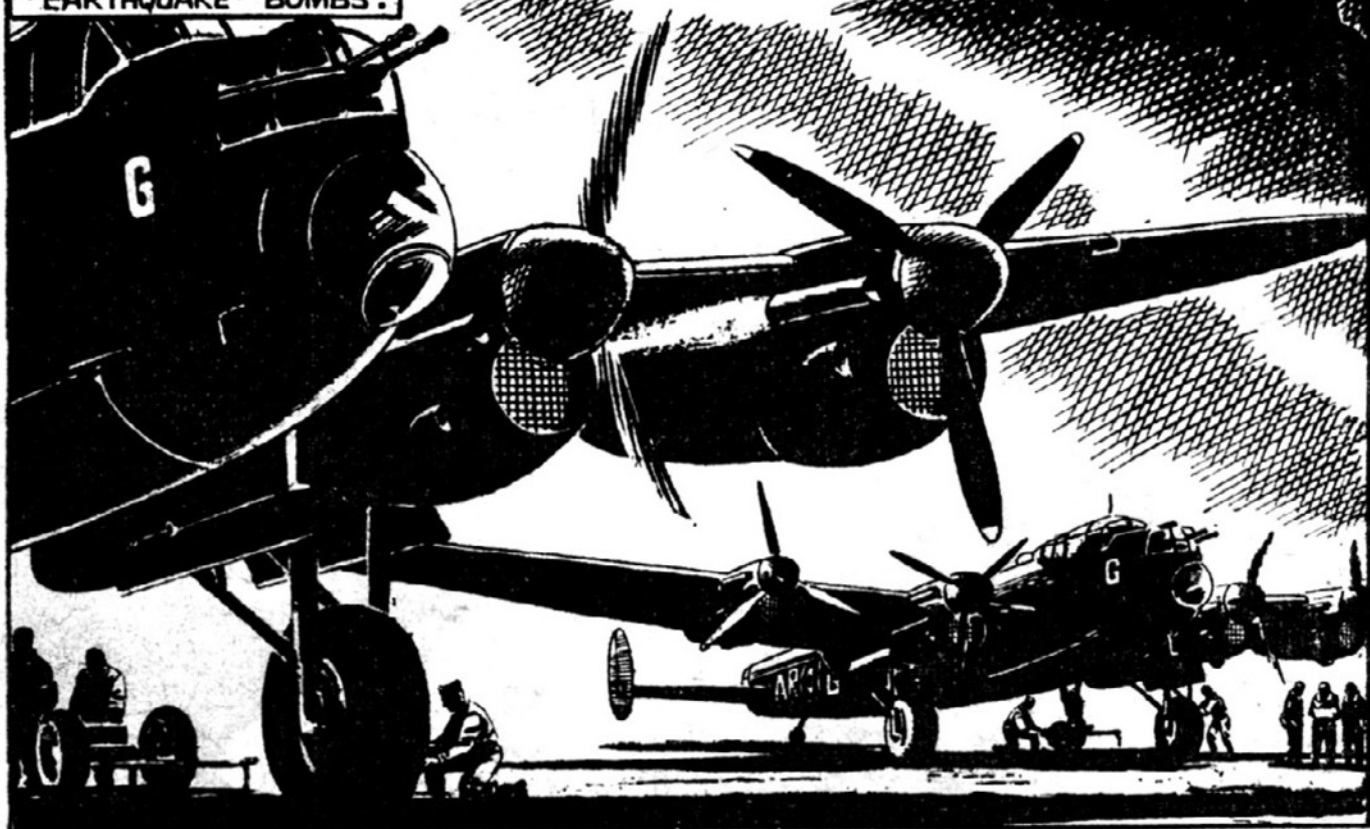
MEANWHILE, MAJOR BILL MILNER'S FORCE HAD SLIPPED OUT OF FORT HAGEN. BILL HIMSELF WAS IN THE LEADING ROCKET SHIP. NOW THE TIME HAD COME FOR ACTION, HE FELT ALL HIS OLD CONFIDENCE RETURNING. IT WAS ALWAYS THE WAITING THAT DAUNTED...



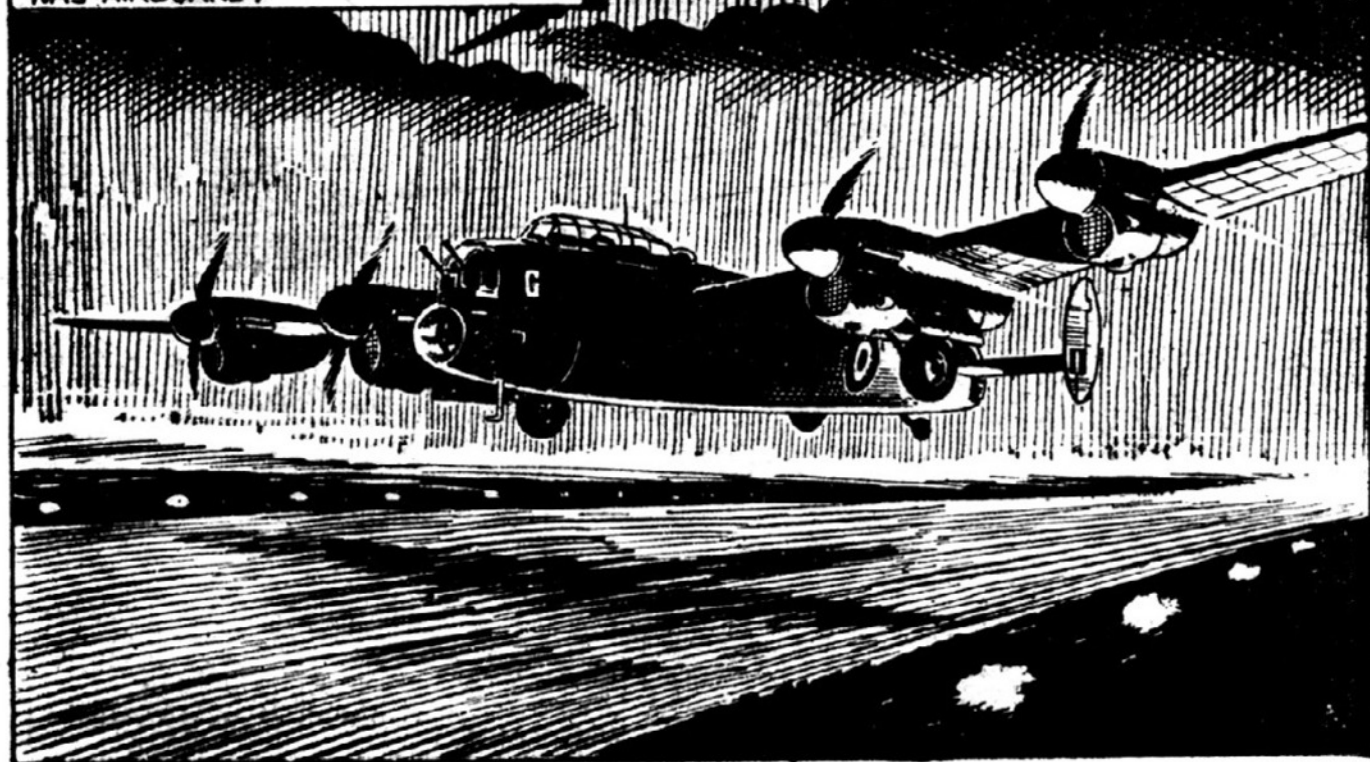
WELL TO THE WEST, THE MAIN ASSAULT FORCE WOULD ALSO BE POUNDING TOWARDS THEIR TOUGHEST ASSIGNMENT—WESTKAPELLE.

## Task Force

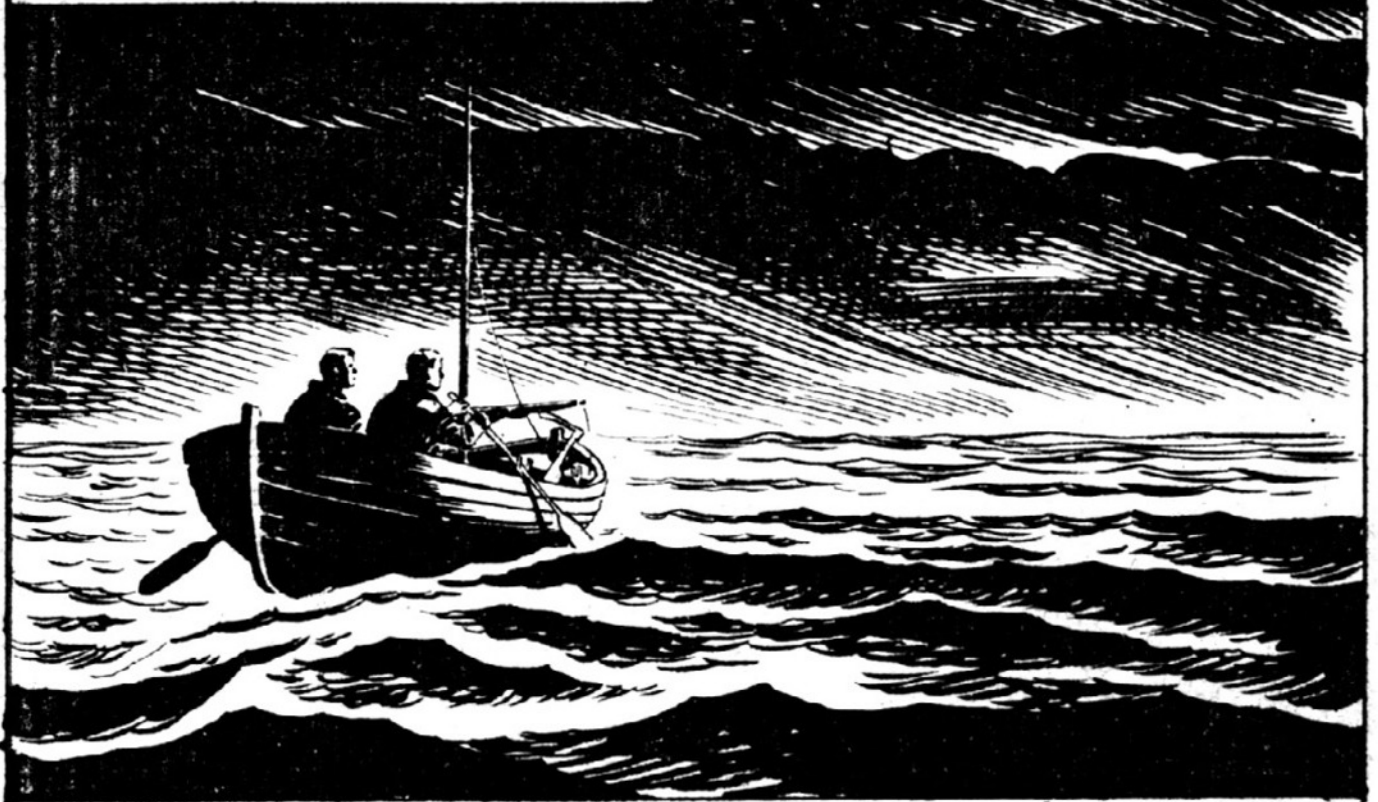
AT THE SAME MOMENT, EIGHT LANCASTER AIRCRAFT OF BOMBER COMMAND STOOD WARMING UP. STARKLY SINISTER IN THAT DARK HOUR BEFORE DAWN, THEIR GIANT FRAMES CRAOLED THE AWESOME WEIGHT OF 12,000 lb. "EARTHQUAKE" BOMBS.



AS THE FIRST FAINT STREAKS OF LIGHT APPEARED IN THE EAST, THE GROUND SHOOK WITH THE THUNDEROUS TAKE-OFF. OPERATION "FLOODGATES" WAS AIRBORNE!



TO CHRIS HARMER AND BERNHARD, THE FIRST FAINT GLIMMERINGS OF DAWN SPELT A NUMBING DEFEAT. THEY HAD LOST THE RACE AGAINST TIME.



THE YOUNG SERGEANT'S HEAD LIFTED AS A FAR-OFF STEADY RUMBLING SOUNDED LOW IN THE SKY. HE RECOGNISED THE OMINOUS SOUND ONLY TOO WELL...

LANCASTERS!



IN THAT SAME DESPAIRING MOMENT, BERNHARD ROSE TO HIS FEET. HE, TOO, HAD HEARD A SOUND... BUT A SOUND THAT CAME FROM AHEAD AND ON THE WATER ITSELF. SUDDENLY HE BROKE THE GLUM SILENCE WITH A SHOUT...

LOOK... SHIPS!  
IT IS THE ATTACK  
FORCE!

YOU'RE  
RIGHT! SHOUT...  
WAVE!





IT WAS BILL MILNER'S FORCE CHURNING STEADILY TOWARDS ITS TARGET. A SHARP-EYED LOOK-OUT SPOTTED THE PAIR WAVING FRANTICALLY.

IT SEEMS URGENT, MAJOR. ONE'S AN AIRMAN BY THE LOOK OF HIS JACKET.

OKAY, GEORGE. SLOW ALONGSIDE AND HAUL 'EM IN ... BUT WE CAN'T STOP.

BILL MILNER RECOGNISED CHRIS INSTANTLY...

WELL, BLOW ME... IT'S THE YOUNG BOMB-AIMER! SO YOU BALED OUT OKAY, AFTER ALL?

THAT'S RIGHT, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING URGENT, SIR... MUST TELL YOU.

SOBERED BY THE OTHER'S DISTRACTED LOOK, BILL LISTENED INTENTLY WHILE CHRIS POURED OUT HIS FEARS.

YOU REMEMBER THAT PLACE, SIR. THOSE CELLARS ARE BELOW SEA-LEVEL... EVERYTHING IS. WHEN THOSE LANC'S SMASH THAT DYKE...

SO BRUCKNER WOULD LET MY LADS DROWN LIKE RATS, EH?

SUDDENLY ANGRY, BILL'S NATURAL IMPULSE WAS TO CONTACT BASE AND CALL OFF THE BOMBERS. BUT OTHER FORCES BEYOND HIMSELF WERE IN MOTION—DEMANDING—INSISTENT—FORCES GREATER THAN EVEN THE HUMANE PROMPTING TO SAVE A FEW DOOMED MEN.

MY OWN LADS IN THOSE CELLARS! BUT— BUT THIS IS A FULL-SCALE ATTACK—COMMITTED—WITH MANY LIVES DEPENDING ON IT—I CAN'T TURN BACK NOW!

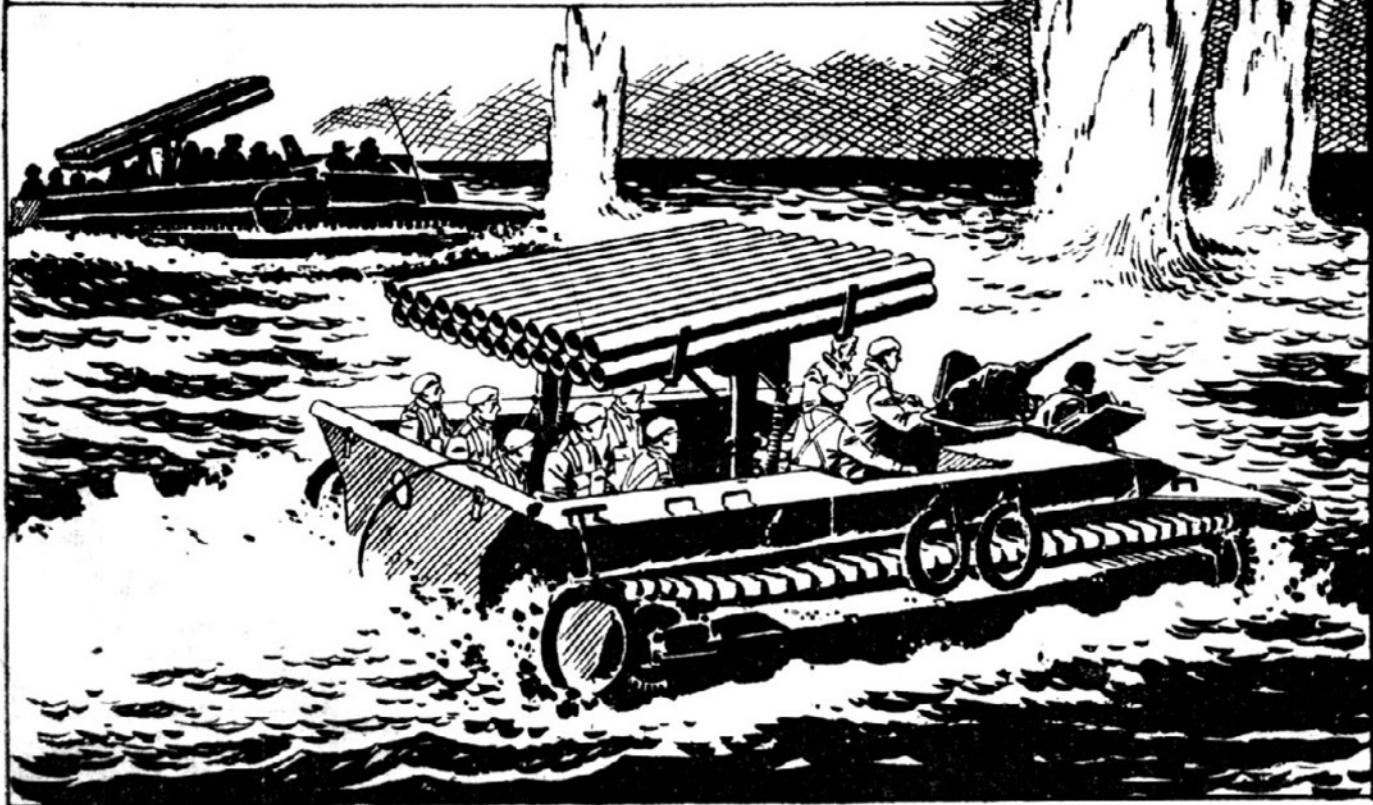
HE KNEW HE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO GO ON. HE WRACKED HIS BRAINS FOR SOME SOLUTION, SOME WAY TO PRESS HOME THE ATTACK AND YET SAVE THE IMPRISONED MEN. SUDDENLY, HE SAW A SLIM RAY OF HOPE...

WE WEREN'T GOING THROUGH THE GAP BEFORE THE WATER LEVELLED OFF A BIT. BUT NOW WE'LL HAVE TO RIDE IN WITH THE FLOOD... AND GET TO THE CELLARS BEFORE THE SEA DOES!

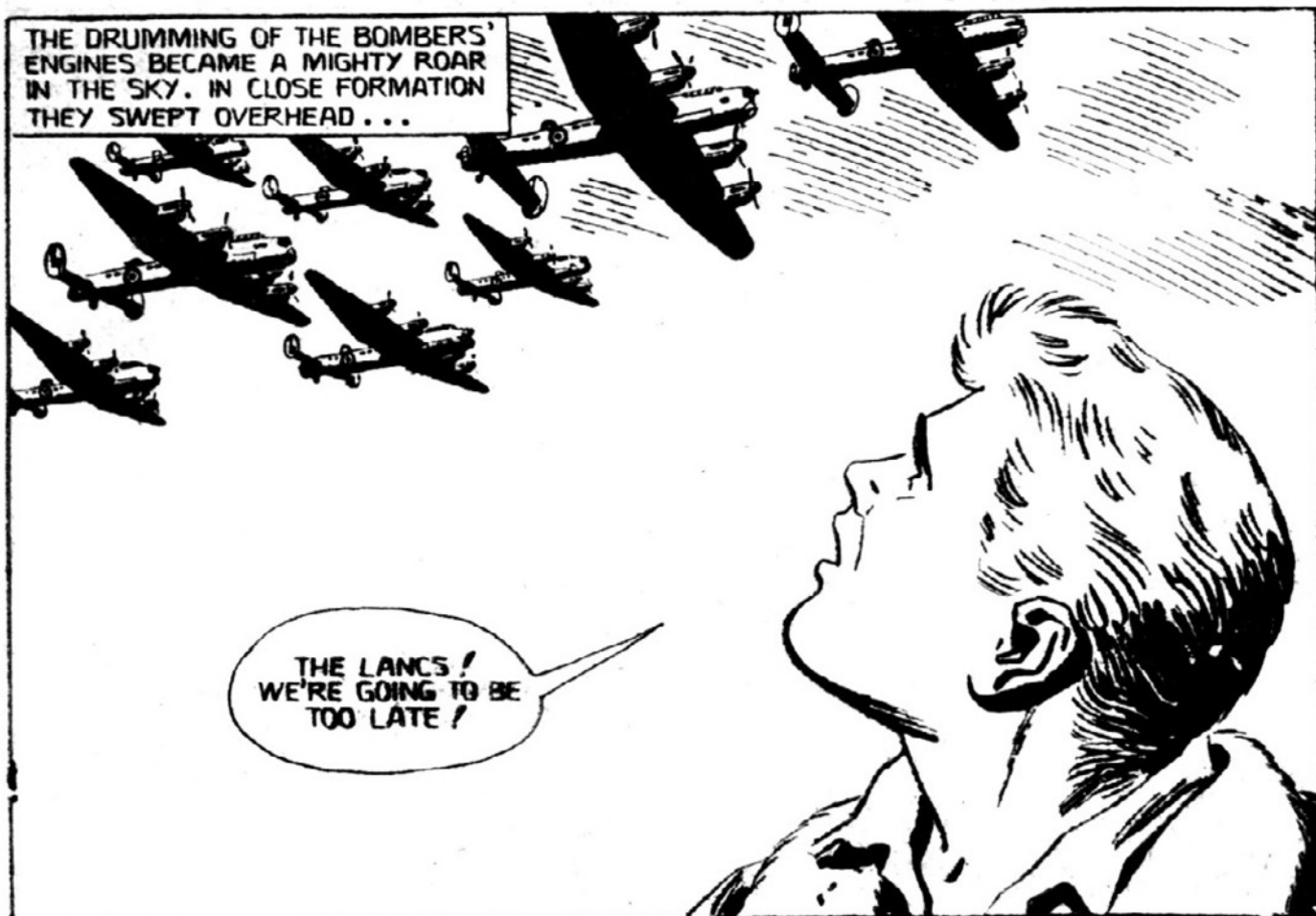


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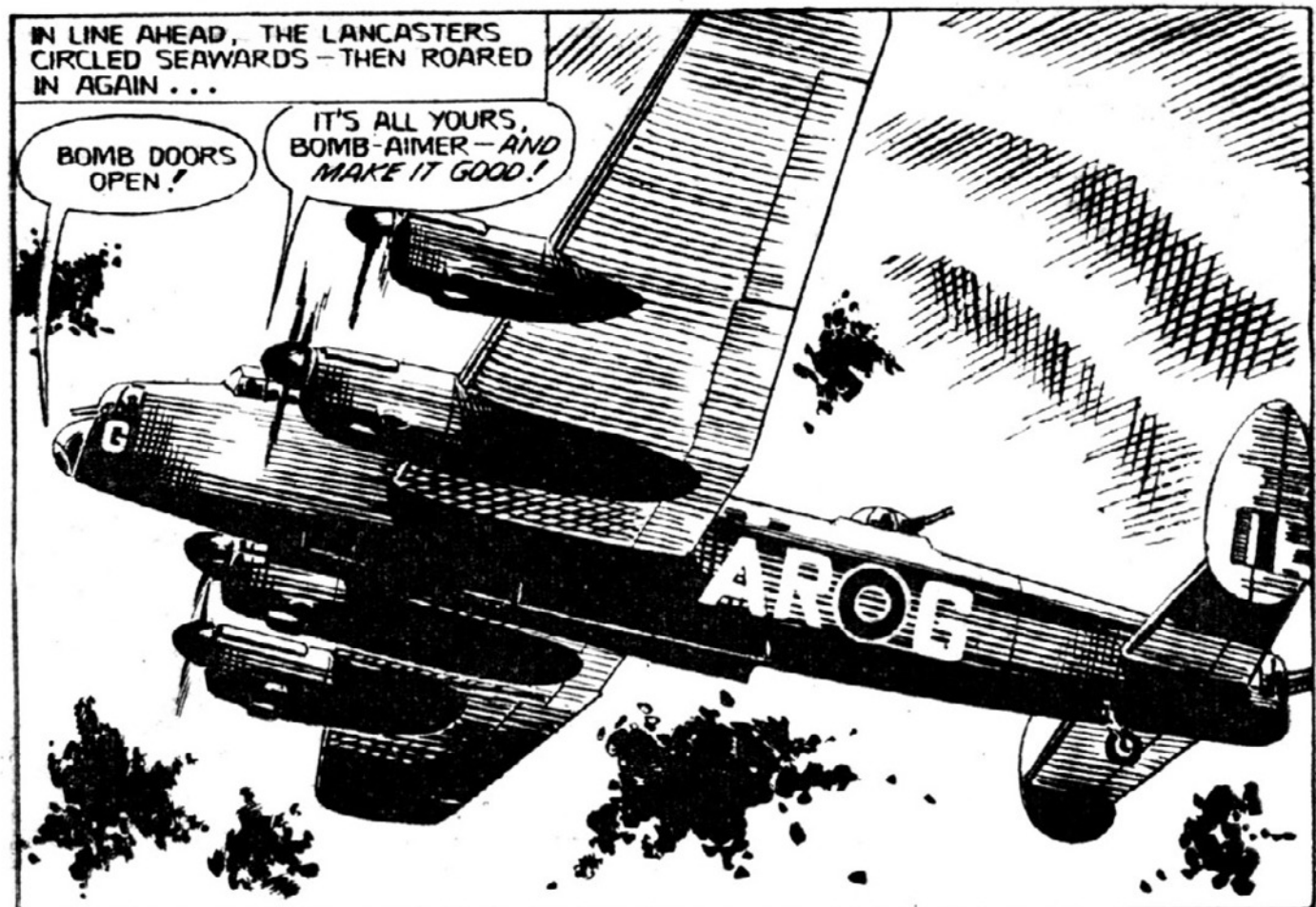
NEW ORDERS WERE FLASHED TO THE SMALL FLEET. THE SKY WAS ALREADY LIGHTENING AND FOREWARNED BY RADAR, THE ENEMY GUNS WERE PROBING FOR THE APPROACHING INVASION FORCE.



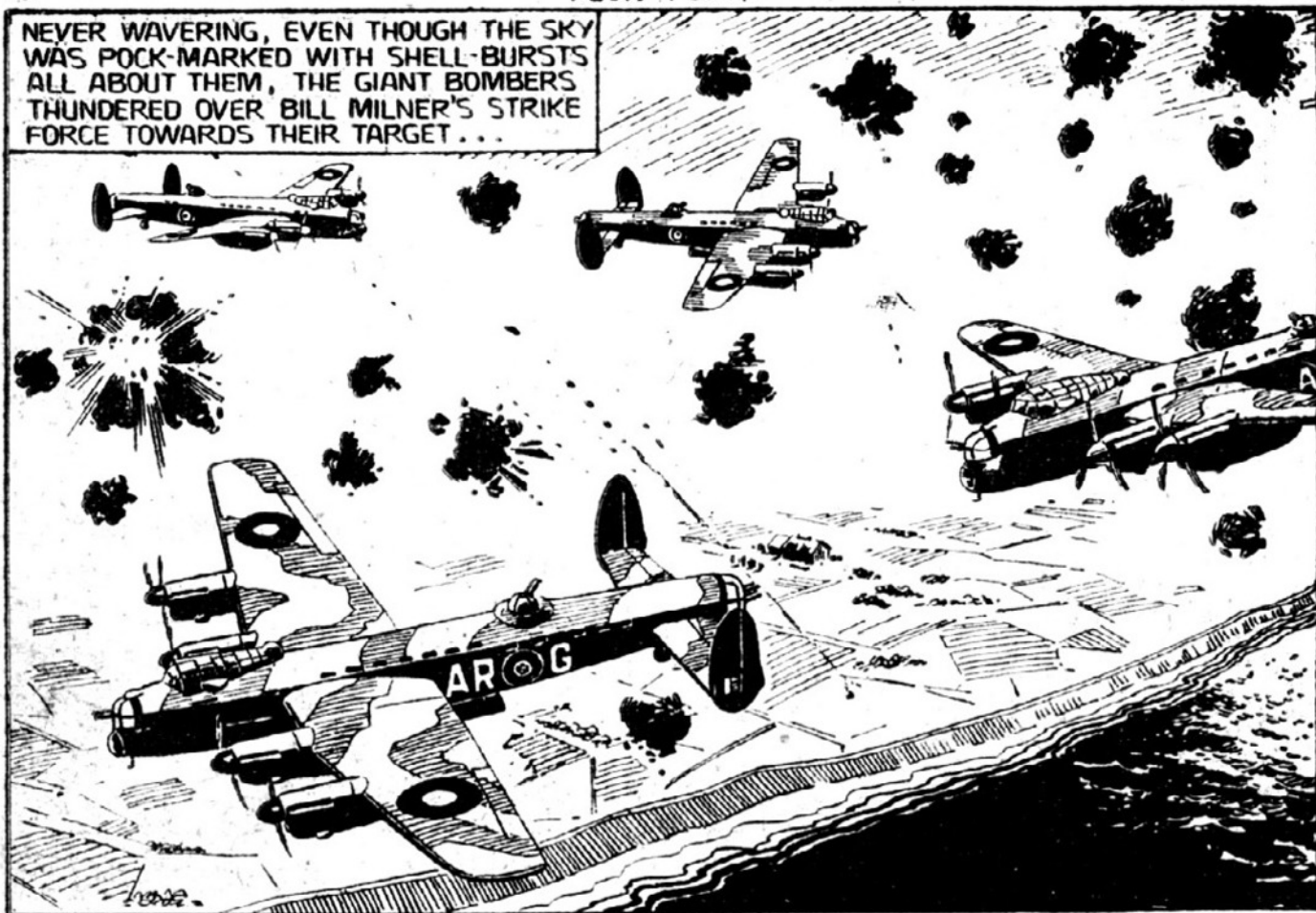
THE DRUMMING OF THE BOMBERS' ENGINES BECAME A MIGHTY ROAR IN THE SKY. IN CLOSE FORMATION THEY SWEEP OVERHEAD...







NEVER WAVERING, EVEN THOUGH THE SKY WAS POCK-MARKED WITH SHELL-BURSTS ALL ABOUT THEM, THE GIANT BOMBERS THUNDERED OVER BILL MILNER'S STRIKE FORCE TOWARDS THEIR TARGET...



FROM A DEFENSIVE POSITION NEAR TO HIS HEADQUARTERS, OBERSTLEUTNANT ERNST BRUCKNER TRIED TO ASSESS THE STRENGTH OF THE ATTACK...

IS THIS ANOTHER FEINT, I WONDER, WHILE THE REAL ATTACK GOES IN AT WESTKAPELLE?



THE CONTINUOUS THUNDER OF AIRCRAFT REACHED THE EARS OF THE COMMANDOS IMPRISONED IN THE CELLAR. HARSHLY TREATED THOUGH THEY HAD BEEN, THEIR SPIRITS LIFTED IMMEDIATELY...

SOUNDS LIKE FOUR-ENGINE STUFF. MUST BE OURS!

YUS... COME TO PLASTER JERRY. UP THE RAFF!

THE ROCKET BUFFALOES WERE CLOSING WITH THE DYKE AS THE LEADING LANCASTER BEGAN ITS RUN...

A SHADE MORE RIGHT... HOLD IT... HOLD IT...

SECONDS LATER THE SEA ERUPTED TO THE TERRIBLE BLAST OF FIVE TONS OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE.





## Task Force

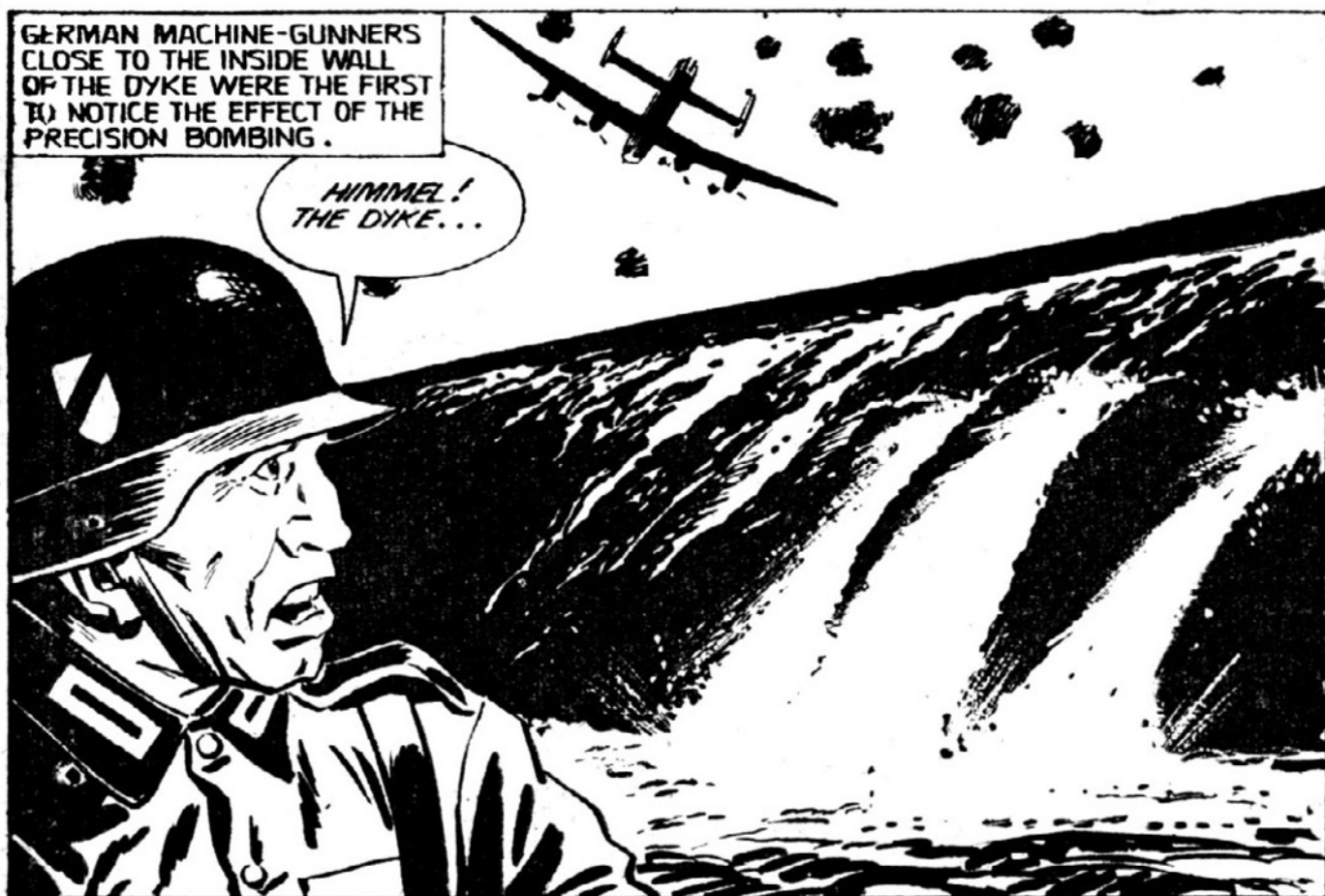
THE TORTURED SEA HAD BARELY SUBSIDED WHEN IT WAS TORN AFRESH BY THE SECOND PLANE'S DEVASTATING LOAD.

BANG ON THE TARGET—BUT THE WALL'S STILL HOLDING!



GERMAN MACHINE-GUNNERS CLOSE TO THE INSIDE WALL OF THE DYKE WERE THE FIRST TO NOTICE THE EFFECT OF THE PRECISION BOMBING.

HIMMEL!  
THE DYKE...



FROM WHERE THE GERMAN COMMANDER STOOD, THE DAMAGE WAS NOT APPARENT AND A COLD SMILE TWITCHED HIS LIPS AS A LANCASTER WAS HIT...



THE LAST "EARTHQUAKE" BOMB HAD BEEN DROPPED - THE DYKE STILL HELD - BUT ONLY FOR SECONDS.

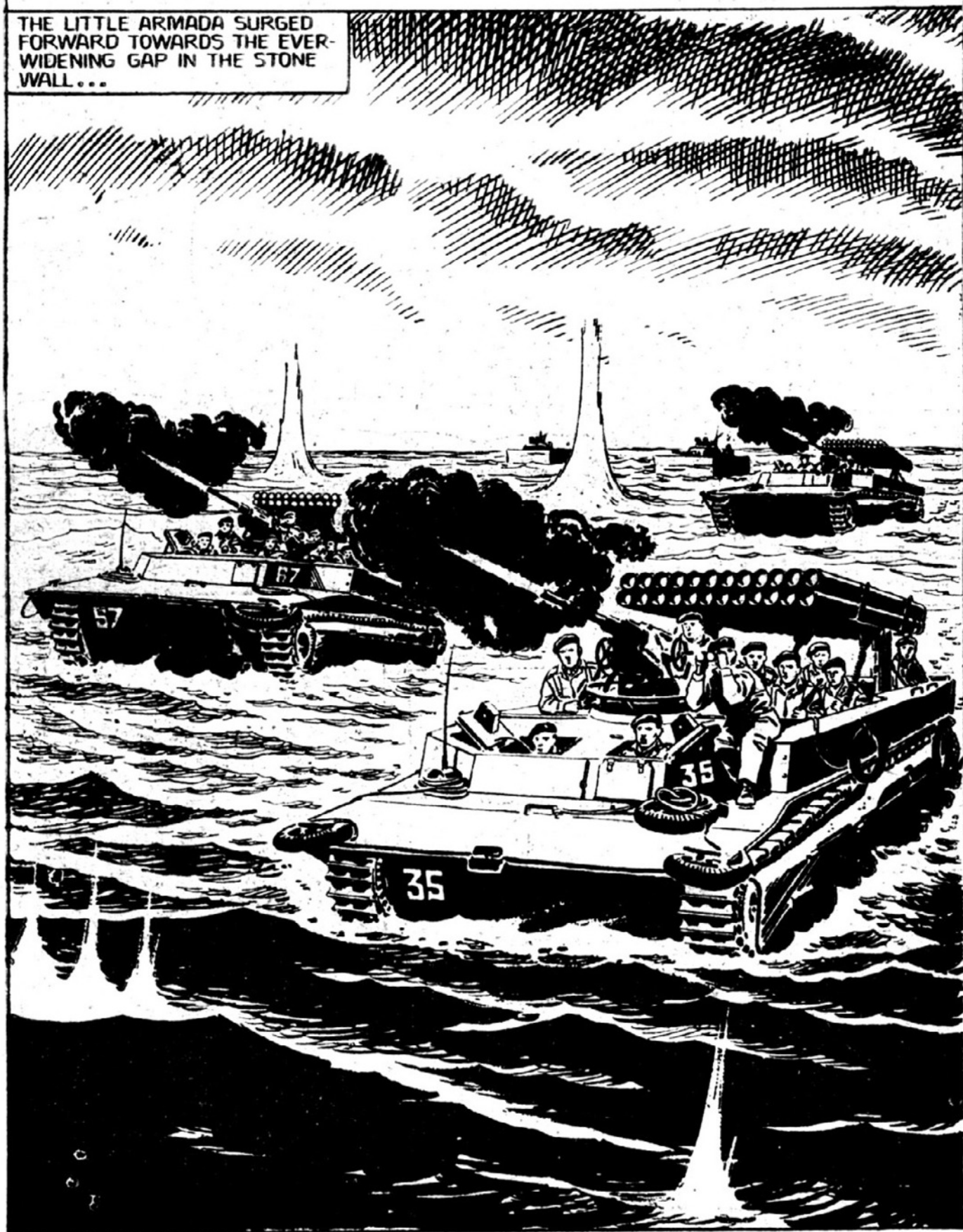


BILL'S FINGERS CLOSED ABOUT THE VEREY PISTOL THAT WOULD SIGNAL THE ASSAULT. SUDDENLY A SHOUT WENT UP, THE DYKE CAVED IN AND BILL'S HAND FLEW UPWARD...



## Chapter 5 A RACE WITH DEATH

THE LITTLE ARMADA SURGED FORWARD TOWARDS THE EVER-WIDENING GAP IN THE STONE WALL...





THE TERRIBLE, RELENTLESS PRESSURE OF THE SEA BEGAN TO WIDEN THE CRACKS IN THE WALL STARTED BY THE BOMBS. SUDDENLY IT BEGAN TO CRUMBLE...



BRUCKNER'S EYES NARROWED. FOR THE FIRST TIME HE FELT A TWINGE OF ANXIETY AND HE ISSUED IMMEDIATE ORDERS TO WITHDRAW TO PREPARED POSITIONS ON HIGHER GROUND.

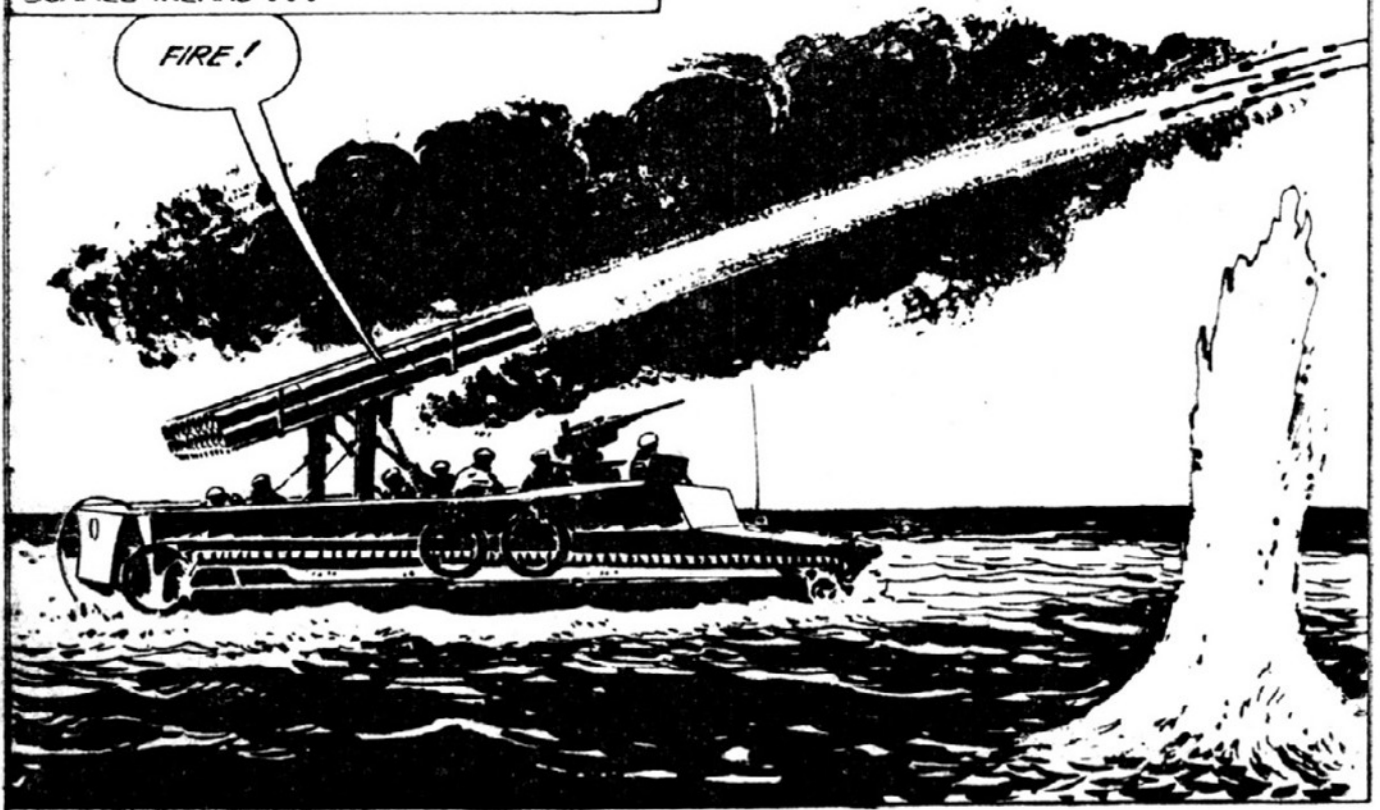


IN THE CELLARS BELOW THE GERMAN H.Q., A STAB OF APPREHENSION RAN THROUGH THE PRISONERS...

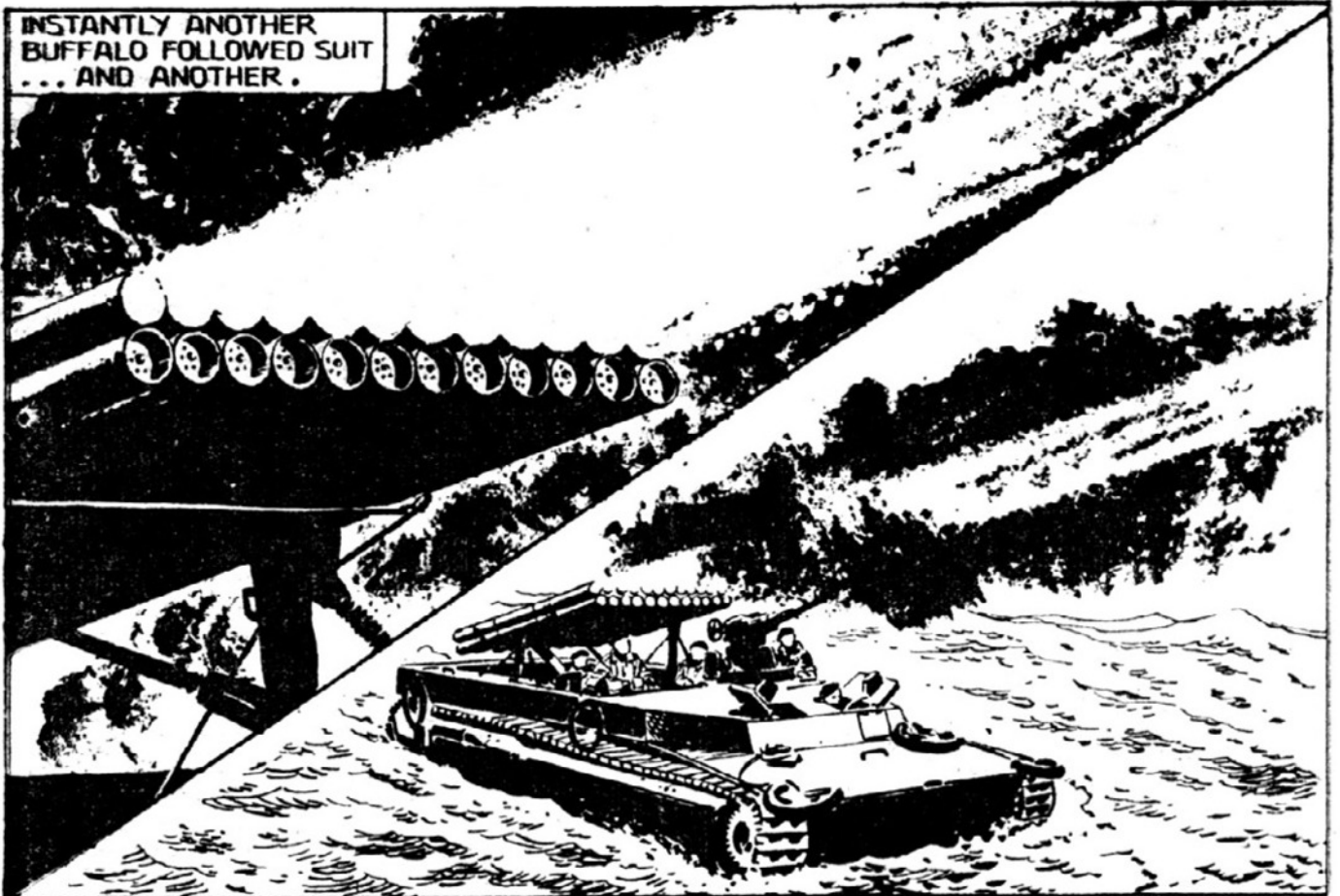


MAJOR BILL MILNER WAS ALREADY AIMING HIS CRAFT TOWARDS THE CRUMBLING GAP IN THE DYKE AND A SALVO OF ROCKETS SOARED INLAND ...

FIRE!



INSTANTLY ANOTHER BUFFALO FOLLOWED SUIT ... AND ANOTHER.

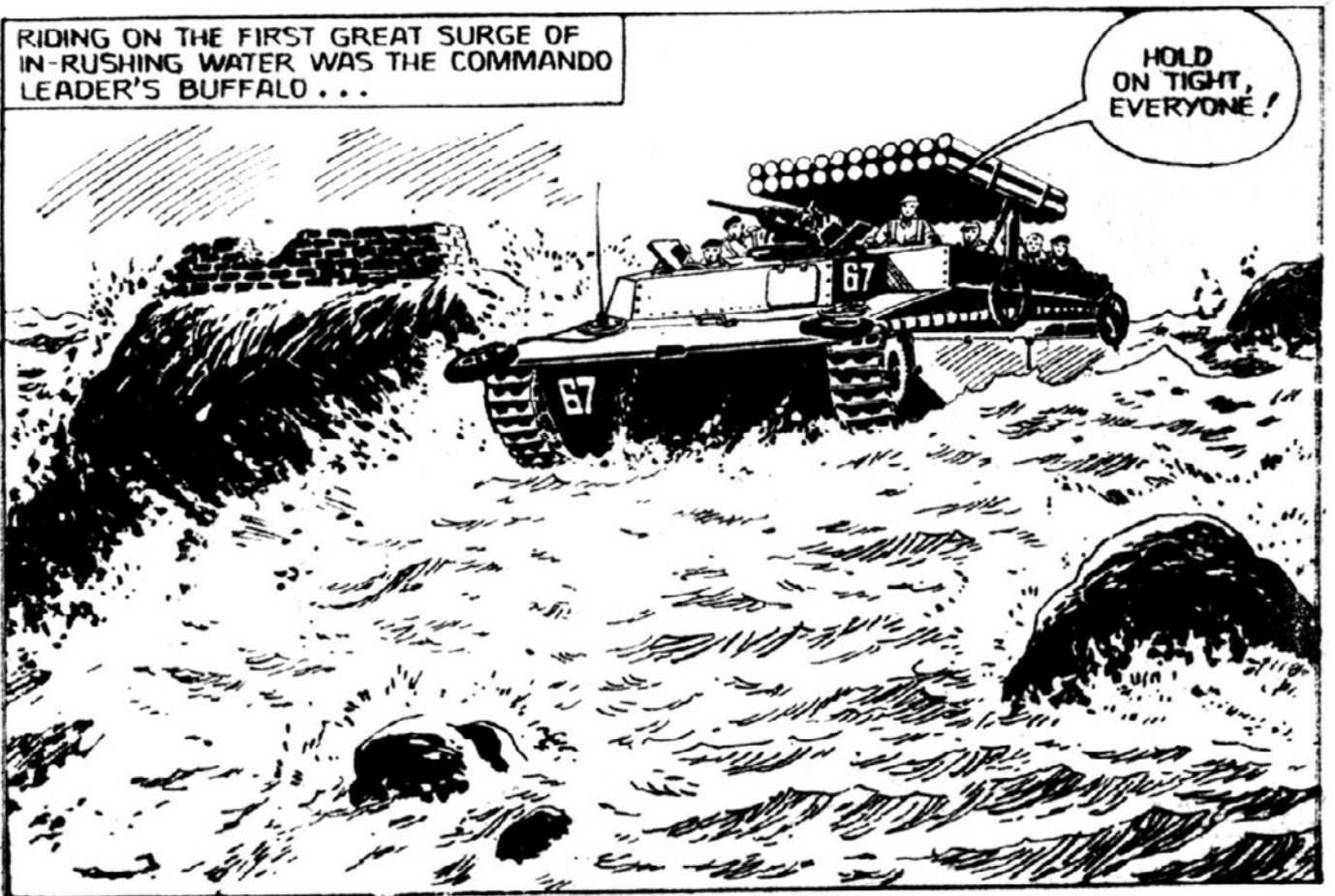


THE DEADLY MISSILES STREAKED OVER THE TEMPESTUOUS WATERS AND SMASHED INTO THE ENEMY GUN EMPLACEMENTS WITH PULVERISING FORCE.



RIDING ON THE FIRST GREAT SURGE OF IN-RUSHING WATER WAS THE COMMANDO LEADER'S BUFFALO...

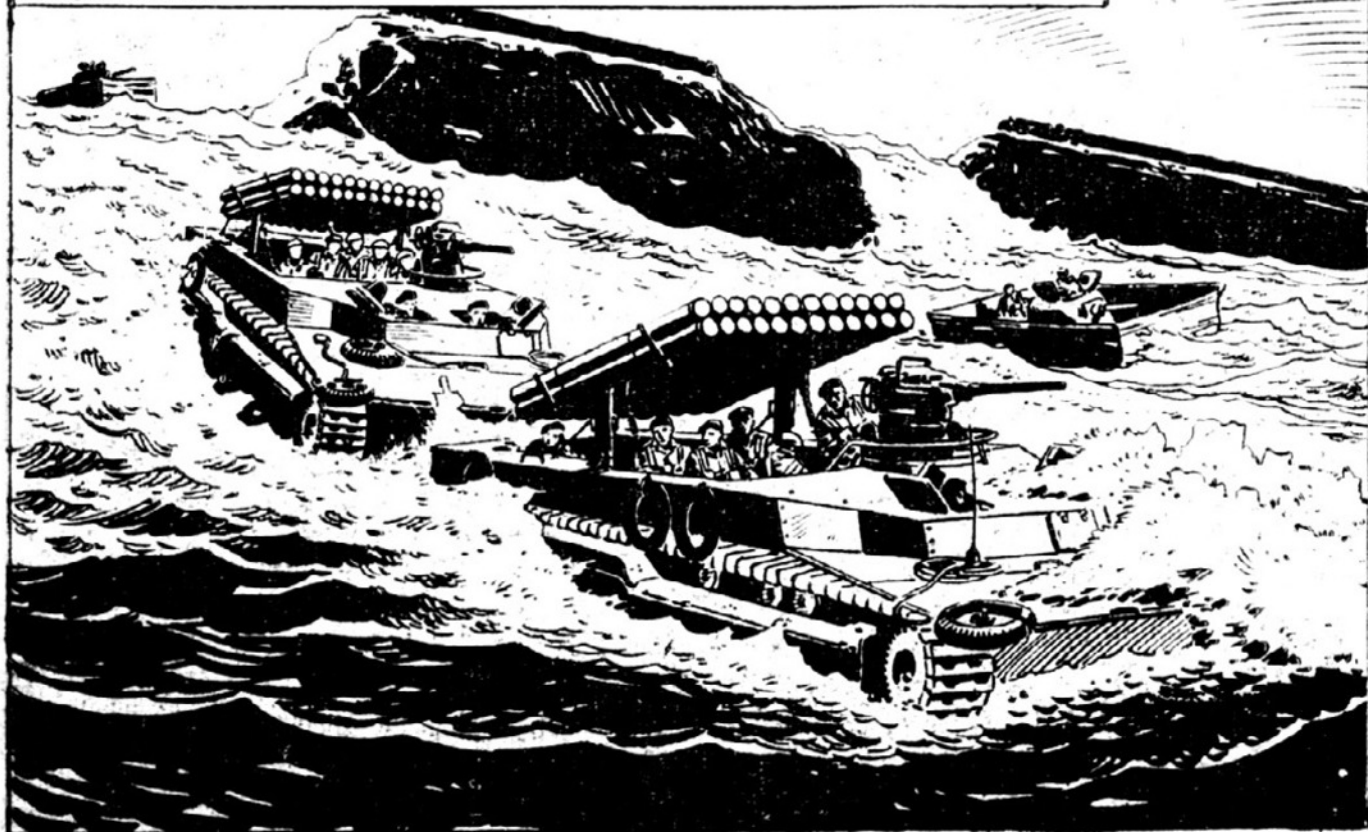
HOLD ON TIGHT, EVERYONE!





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THE HEAVY AMPHIBIOUS VEHICLES WERE TOSSED ABOUT ALMOST HELPLESSLY IN THE TORRENT AND A COLLISION WAS ONLY NARROWLY AVOIDED . . .



THEN THEY WERE ON EVEN KEEL, PLOUGHING THROUGH THE WATER TOWARDS THE ENEMY WITH GUNS CRASHING DEAFENINGLY.



THE TIDAL WAVE OF DESTRUCTION  
SWEEPED DOWN ON THE GERMANS'  
FORWARD DEFENCES —  
OVERWHELMING THEM IN  
THOUSANDS OF TONS OF FOAMING  
WATER . . .

AAAGH!



ERNST BRUCKNER AND HIS OFFICERS  
SCUTTLED BACK TOWARDS THE H. Q.  
BUILDING AS THE SEA BORE DOWN  
UPON THEM . . .

QUICK,  
QUICK! INTO  
HEADQUARTERS —  
WE WILL FIGHT  
FROM THERE!



THE SHERMAN "SWIMMING TANKS" HAD TOUCHED GROUND AND THE CREWS PROMPTLY DROPPED THEIR CANVAS SCREENS AND ENGAGED ENEMY STRONGPOINTS AT POINT-BLANK RANGE. THE THUNDER OF BATTLE WAS INCREASING...



BUT MORE TERRIBLE THAN ANY GUNS, THE UNBRIDLED SEA BEGAN TO BURY EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH. INDIFFERENT TO FRIEND OR FOE, IT BEGAN TO POUR THROUGH THE GROUND-LEVEL WINDOWS OF THE CELLAR PRISON.

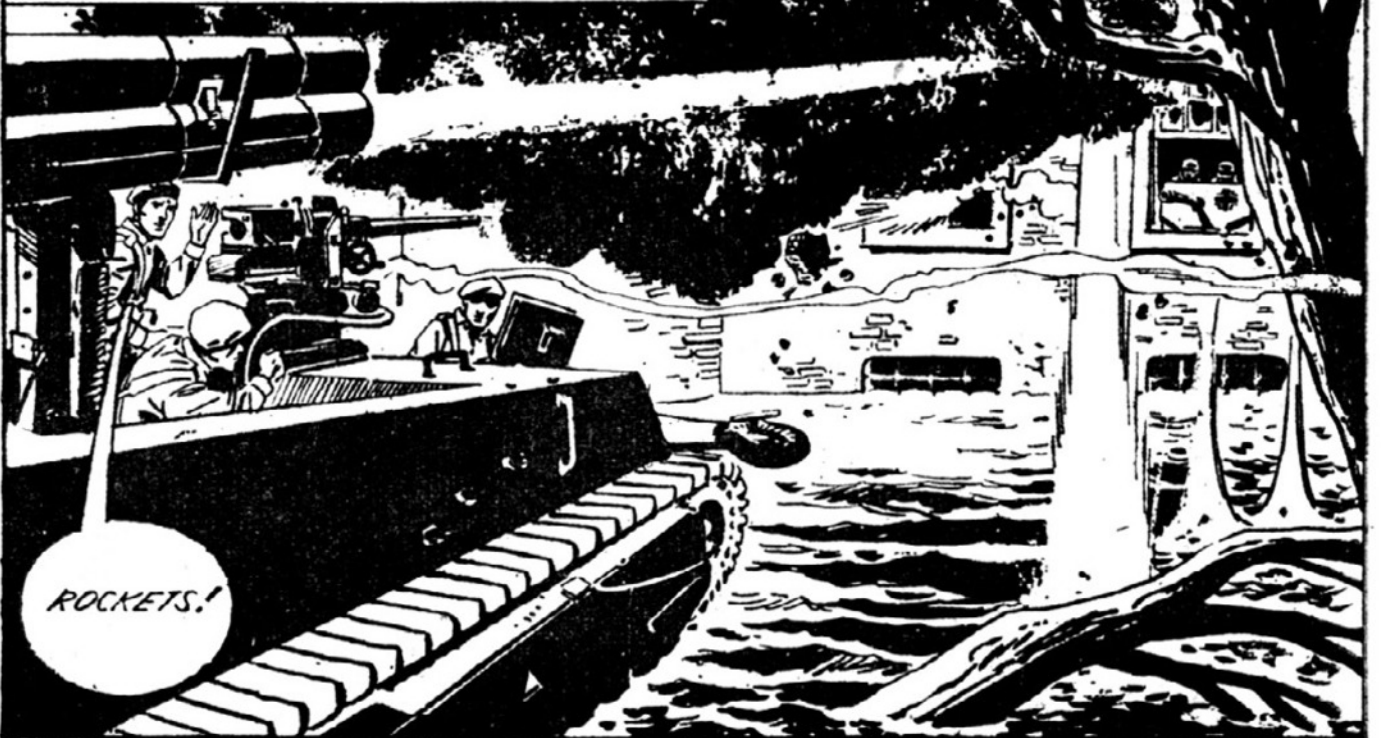




EVEN THE DIN OF BATTLE  
COULD NOT HIDE FROM BILL'S  
EARS THE CRIES OF THE  
TRAPPED MEN. THE BUILDING  
WAS A VERITABLE FORTRESS,  
ITS GUNS TAKING SAVAGE  
TOLL OF MEN AND BOATS.



BILL MILNER HAD BEEN RELUCTANT TO USE HIS FULL FIRE-POWER ON THE  
BUILDING THAT HELD THE PRISONERS BUT SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE ...  
SOMETHING SWIFT, FORCEFUL AND DECISIVE.



THE SALVO SLAMMED INTO THE BUILDING WITH A FORCE THAT WIPE OUT GUNS AND MEN AND STUPEFIED THE SURVIVORS. BILL'S COMMANDOS STORMED FORWARD...

IN WE GO, LADS—  
DOWN TO THE  
CELLARS!



THE PLIGHT OF THE PRISONERS WAS SERIOUS — THE LEVEL OF THE WATER CREPT REMORSELESSLY HIGHER AND THEIR DESPAIRING YELLS BROUGHT NO ANSWER...

LET US OUT  
OF HERE!

HOLD UP,  
MATEY.

IT'S CRAMP  
...MY...MY  
LEG.





THE GERMANS WERE FIGHTING WITH THE FEROCITY OF CORNERED RATS, DISPUTING EVERY INCH OF THE ADVANCE.



BUT EVERY LOST MOMENT SPURRED BILL'S MEN TO FIERCER EFFORTS.

BY SHEER PHYSICAL FORCE, THE COMMANDO LEADER BEAT HIS WAY THROUGH THE ENEMY AND DRAWN BY THE SHOUTS OF THE PRISONERS, HE LEAPED DOWN A FLIGHT OF STONE STEPS. FOR A MOMENT, A GUARD BARRERED HIS WAY...

COMING, LADS!

HURRY!

AAGH!





SNATCHING THE KEYS FROM A HOOK ON THE WALL, BILL WRENCHED OPEN THE CELLAR DOOR TO FACE A SIGHT THAT, TOUGH AS HE WAS, WOULD HAUNT HIM EVERMORE... THE FACES OF DOOMED MEN SUDDENLY REPRIEVED.



MEANWHILE, YOUNG BERNHARD GROOT WAS HAVING HIS OWN PERSONAL MOMENT OF SATISFACTION. ALL THE MISERY AND PRIVATION SUFFERED BY HIS PEOPLE UNDER THE HATED NAZI RULE WENT INTO A CRASHING UPPERCUT TO BRUCKNER'S JAW.



THE FIRING IN THE H. Q. BUILDING HAD BEGUN TO DIE DOWN — THE BRUTAL GERMAN DEFENDERS HAD AT LAST BEEN OVERPOWERED. WHEN BILL LED THE SOAKED BUT HAPPY PRISONERS OUT OF THE CELLARS, HE FOUND MORE GOOD NEWS AWAITING HIM...

THE ENEMY'S ON THE RUN, SIR!

GREAT WORK, BOYS!



STUBBORN TO THE LAST, THE RETREATING GERMANS ON WALCHEREN CONTINUED TO GIVE STRONG RESISTANCE TO CANADIAN TROOPS ATTACKING FROM THE EAST. BUT WITH VICTORY AT WESTKAPELLE TO SPEED THE ENEMY'S EXIT, THE ISLAND WAS FINALLY CLEARED. WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER, BILL HAD A WORD OF SYMPATHY FOR YOUNG BERNHARD...

SORRY WE HAD TO FLOOD YOUR GOOD LAND, MY FRIEND, THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY.

BETTER THAT THAN GERMANS, MAJOR. NEVER FEAR, WE SHALL RECLAIM IT ONCE AGAIN.



MEANWHILE, CHRIS HARMER, FLYING ONCE AGAIN WITH HIS SQUADRON, WAS ABLE TO GAZE DOWN UPON A TRULY SATISFYING SIGHT... THAT OF ALLIED SHIPS STEAMING UNMOLESTED PAST WALCHEREN TO ANTWERP - GATEWAY TO THE RUHR.



THE CLEARING OF WALCHEREN AND BEVELAND MEANT AN ALLIED DEATH-BLOW AT NORTHERN GERMANY AND EVEN AT BERLIN ITSELF. IT WAS JUST ONE MORE TRIUMPH FOR THOSE TOUGH, BEACH-STORMING WARRIORS OF LAND AND SEA - THE ROYAL MARINE COMMANDOS!



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